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THE HERMIT



LONDON: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS.

THE HERMIT
OF
THE COLORADO HILLS.

A Story of the Texan Pampas.

BY W. H. BUSHNELL.



LONDON AND NEW YORK
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CHAPTER I.

THE PAMPAS—HERDS AND HERDSMEN—THE PANTHER AND THE DEER.

WHAT a glorious dream of freedom are the Pampas! Where can mind, heart, lungs—ay, and the very soul, so drink in a realizing sense of freedom—so feel the perfect expansion that is typical of what we call the infinite? A vast plain of luxuriant foliage, checkered by rainbow blossoms, and over-arched by rainbow clouds. An earth-sea, with billows of brightest green, whose crests are foaming with rosy gold, and the valleys between a changing haze of emerald.

Morning upon the Pampas! Just where they lift their grassy slopes up towards the mountains, that seem stooping down to meet them, a vast herd of lithe-limbed, graceful, slender-horned, and fiery-eyed cattle of that sunny clime are browsing. Thousands upon thousands are rioting in the dewy freshness, grateful for repose unbroken by the sun, and the drops of glittering dew hid in each flowery cup. A living caravan, they soon lose themselves in the rank foliage, though still the waving tops mark every footstep. Mottled, many-colored, or with sides shining with raven blackness, they wander in these God-planted and cultivated gardens—a-maying all their life.

There are watchful eyes upon them. So much wealth is not to be trusted untended. Man will watch everywhere that which is the representative of wealth; so,

perched almost like an eagle's nest upon the side of the nearest mountain, appeared the hut of the herdsman, affording a look-out over the wide expanse of that verdant ocean. From that point he could mark the wandering of his four-footed charges, see the approach of storm, mark the first gleam of the tropical sun, and guard against the stampeding Comanches.

There are brave hearts beating in those little eyries; hearts that are as careless of danger as their tough frames and bowstring-like sinews are of fatigue; men, stout-limbed, keen-eyed, and ready with the rifle and the lariat. Sun-embrowned, and with long hair and beard streaming to the wind, dressed in tough deerskin, and mounted upon but half-trained mustangs, they are the very picture of health, muscular beauty, daring, and grace, as they dash headlong among their unbroken herds. Untrained in the schools of fashionable etiquette and effeminacy, uncursed with luxury, cradled and educated amid hardships, they yet bear within their breasts truer hearts, and a more perfect sense of honor, than many who quibble at a word, and blazon forth their shame to the world, with a pistol-shot in defence of the "bubble reputation."

There is no half way with the herdsman. Blood alone can pay for blood. Generous to a fault, daring even to rashness, tender-hearted even to tears, but stern as death itself, he has made his mark upon the historic pages of the south-western border, and written his name on the battle-fields of Texas and Mexico.

Before a herdsman's hut, early in the morning of a bright May day, were three men, alike in stature, dress, and station. All were herdsmen, and all men who laughed danger to scorn. One was already mounted, one drawing still more tightly the rope-girths of his huge saddle, and the third leaning upon his long rifle.

"I tell yer, Bruce Weaver," said the one who was still unmounted, though his fiery mustang stood feeding within reach of his bridle-arm, addressing the one who was checking his more than impatient steed, "I tell yer we hain't bin so long left erlone and in quiet for nothin'."

"I know, Sy Glover, yer allus playin' on ther same string. It's ther old cry of 'arter er calm, er storm.'"

"Waal, ef I am, you'll find it ter be true. Them cattle out yender are too temptin' er bait fer ther red-skins ter long keep ther hands off of. We'll have er brush before long, or yer may call me a greaser."

"Let it come, then! It's mighty dull out here, and I'm achin' fer er fandango of some sort. Now, er shot or two at somethin' besides a thievin' kioter wouldn't set er feller back none—not ther least grain in ther world. I'll bet an ounce that I kin pick off ther scalp-lock every time, at two hundred yards."

"Good shootin' that," answered the man who had hitherto been silent. "I've known yer ter miss ther red spot on er blackbird's wing when he warn't more'n half that distance."

"Waal, you needn't laugh about it, Rob Hamlin. That war when I had that thar *old* rifle, that warn't no better nor er shot-gun."

"It ain't allus ther best gun that makes ther best shot, I kin tell yer. But thar go some of ther cattle cavortin' off toward ther old buffaler lick;" and, swinging himself upon his horse, he dashed down the slope, and was soon lost in the deep grass of the Pampas, with his heavy-lashed whip snapping a chorus to his ringing voice.

"Rob is right. I tell yer he is right," continued Glover.

"Waal, perhaps he is, Sy; but yer allus er grumblin' erbout somethin' or nuther."

"You may find that I do not grumble fer nothin', arter all. But Rob is true as steel and sure as er flint, when it comes ter trouble."

"Yes, he's all that; but he yer git done fixin' yer old saddle, and go along with me ter help him turn them cattle. I believe ther gnats and musketers and gallinippers will eat off ther hides erfore they live none with them—ther blood-thirsty reptiles!"

"Better fix arter yer own, ef ther Comanches take er notion fer a few horns."

"I wished they would take that thar broad-horned critter, fer, of all ther rampaging brutes I ever saw, that beats all."

"Ef he hadn't bin er kind er pet of ther old man's. I'd have put er bullet spang through the curl of his head long ago, and had er good brile out on his tenderline. He's worse nor er hull drove of buffalers. But it won't do, and all ther more beca'se he's er comin' out here soon."

"Comin' out here?"

"Yes, of course he is."

"I don't believe it."

"I tell yer it's true, and I shouldn't wonder if he brought his gal erlong with him."

"Brought out his daughter!"

"Yes, yer know she's sotted on it fer er long time."

"Pshaw! I kinder reckon it war only fer ther sake of havin' somethin' to talk erbout."

"No, it war in right down earnest."

"Waal, ef he does bring her he's er fool."

"But such er pooty gal would look more like er angel than er human way out here."

"You may well say that. But what ef ther Indians should come, as Rob Hamblin allows they will erfore long?"

"We'll have somethin' ter fight fer then worth the saving."

"Besides our lives. But it's time we war er lookin' arter them cattle."

"Yes, Rob has more'n his hands full."

"Waal, I'm ready; are you?"

"Yes, all ready and—but——" and suddenly springing from his horse, he motioned to his comrade, and hid himself behind the trunk of a giant tree.

"Comanches!" whispered the other, as he sprang to his side, with his rifle ready for instant use.

"I reckon; but lie low. Hark!"

A rushing in the bushes, a sharp cracking of dry branches, and, leaping from the tangled gloom into the sunlight, came a noble buck. The wide-spread and branching antlers were laid back, the eyes flashing with fear, the mouth open as if gasping for air, and the flanks flecked with foam. Terror was the incentive of that race, as, clearing the ground with great leaps, it dashed on, regardless of its curse.

"Er painter!" whispered Glover, as it passed.

Leaping with its long, tireless fling, with blood-shot eyes and open jaws, came the lion of the South-west, in eager pursuit of its prey. Close to the brute's head were pressed the ears, and the updrawn lip revealed the sharp, long teeth. Lithe as a cat, and sinewy as a race-horse, it sprang from point to point; and short, indeed, would have been that woodland race, had not the two herdsmen, as with one impulse, raised their weapons and fired. Even when in mid-air, the twin-bullets reached heart and brain; and, convulsed in death, it fell and rolled down the mountain side. As if stunned by the reports, and looking for its blood-thirsting foe, the noble buck stood for a moment, trembling in every limb, and gazed wildly around.

"It's too bad," said Weaver, "that both on us fired. Ef we hadn't er done so, we'd er had some splendid venison. Just look at that feller now. Two good inches of fat on his brisket, I'll bet er ounce?"

"Ef yer had er dozen loaded rifles, yer shouldn't shoot *that* buck. He had er long run and er hard one for his life, and no man should shoot him while I wher er round."

It was a true woodman's tribute to the most beautiful of all the dwellers of the forest; and though, when hunger pressed, he would have been the first to have sent a bullet whizzing through its heart, yet, when panther-driven, as this one had been, it became to him almost human.

A sharp snort, a swift bound, and the deer became lost to their sight, dashing down into the grassy pampas, to seek its own kind.

"Come," continued Glover, after both had reloaded their rifles—"come, it's time we whar lendin' er helpin' hand ter Rob;" and, flinging himself upon his mustang, he hurried away in pursuit of the insect-tormented cattle, closely followed by his companion.

CHAPTER II.

A RANCHE.—FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

NATURE, aided by art and its refinements, has created many a home of exquisite beauty in the land of the South, that stands unrivalled by any in a more changeable and winter-swept region. There, amid all that is beautiful in leaf and blossom, the planter rears his picturesque home, surrounding it without and decking it within with groves and vine-drapery, and rare works of art and *virtu*. Not that he builds castles or towers, piles up huge masses of stone, or that turret or wall are stained by time or wrapped in ivy—not that he seeks to leave a mansion that will bear the impress of his handiwork and munificence ages after he has passed away, or defy the crumbling power of storm and time, until even the centuries themselves grow old. Such massive structures would be entirely out of harmony with the scenes of nature around. In unison with her caprices, his house is light, graceful, and modelled with exquisite taste—a house that should be seen glimmering through the leafy trees and burning blossoms, bower-like, with slender shafts, twined with roses, upholding the verandah-like roof that surrounds it on every side, and is brilliant in its summer sheen and wreath of fragrant flowers.

Far up on the Brazos river stood such a house, surrounded by flowers of every known hue and perfume. The cactus, with its thorny fingers and blazing blossoms—the dahlia, rose, verbena, and carnations, mingled with their less pretentious sisters, covered the ground; while the orchis, with its blood-red flowers—the cypress-vine, with its feathering spray, and the passion flower, with its purple stars, that talk to one as of heaven—swung from the tall magnolia trees, filling the air with fragrance. All above, below, and around, was one glow of bloom.

Within the house was a fairy temple! A wide wall cut it from either side, subdividing it into four rooms of equal size, and leaving a hollow square in the

centre, in which a fountain threw its crystal spray high upward toward the dome. The jets, rising from every side, and so arranged as to meet, sustained at their junction a golden ball, jewelled with blood-red stars, and in the hollow globe was hung a tiny bell, that ceaselessly rang as it was tossed about by the foamy fingers of the waters. Each of the four rooms was in itself a mimic quarter of the globe. Europe, Asia, Africa, and America were distinctly typified by statuary painting and fanciful devices in fresco, while, in looking from the window of either, the grounds and shrubbery had been so arranged as to keep up, as far as possible, the delusion.

Descended from the heroes who came thither with Hernando Cortez, the owner of this mansion was proud of his pure Castilian blood—perhaps somewhat domineering and haughty in manner, yet possessed of a soul of fire, and an eye keenly alive to, and ever seeking for some new beauty or luxury to make his home still more like an earthly paradise. And all for what?

In the room glittering with the luxuries of one of the transatlantic climes—in that representing civilized Europe—sat a young girl, more than beautiful in all adornments of nature and art. Young she was in years—just trembling on that mystic boundary line that divides girl from womanhood. Through the transparency of her Castilian complexion the warm Southern blood flushed with a delicate crimson, giving it the soft tint that flushes the sea-shell's lips. Her eyes were large, changeful, and intensely black. Her hair, that crowning gift of beauty in womanhood, was long, silken, and fine, almost, as a spider's web, and, like that of all her race, was black as jet. Her figure was tall, and exquisitely moulded, and the daintily-jewelled fingers and slippered feet were sign-manuals of the purity of blood which was her only parent's boast. Only: for hardly had she opened her eyes in the regions of enchantment around her, before Heaven called a soul home in recompense for the new one given to earth—took back a precious life for the tiny pebble just rolled up from the mysterious ocean of eternity upon the shores of Time, and left her semi-orphaned.

Half reclining, the petted beauty sat—beautiful in mind and person, for she possessed all the adornments of a finished education, and was heir of all the countless wealth around her. She kept her languid position, tired with gazing on the splendour, and faint with the perfume that stole in on every side; for even splendour oppresses, and the most exquisite distillations of flowers will pall upon the senses, wearied by the epicurianism of the costly-bound book she had just flung carelessly at her feet. She dreamily listened to the songs of the birds, and watched them through the window, flitting like scales of gold, or quivering fitfully amid the living green.

She was thinking of the glorious days, still speaking from the pages of history, when mailed men shouted the old battle-cry—when “Sant Iago and Spain” rang thundering through the land, and the yellow banner of Castile and the Cross swept widely over the throne of the haughty Montezuma. Perchance she was sighing for the splendours and pomp of the pictured glories of Ferdinand and Isabella, or to hear a fabled minstrel of the olden time pour forth his soul in music, such as breaks rippling upon the ear like moonlit waves upon a beach of golden sand. Perchance—— But she cut her reverie short, and took from a quaintly-carved table at her side a tiny bell, and rang it gently.

“Quito,” she said, and the soft, almost voluptuous Spanish melted upon her lips like music—“Quito, where is my father?”

A slave, fancifully dressed in garments of bright colors, that intensified his extreme blackness, had entered at her signal, and stood waiting her commands.

“Quito,” she repeated, as he bent before her, “have you seen my father?”

By motions only was his reply made, and in them appeared a solution of the strange sorrow that always rested on his face, except in her presence. The boy was dumb! Not so by nature—for seldom is it, indeed, that she thus mars her master work—but by the hand of a brutal master. For some unknown offence, a monster in the shape of man had caused his tongue to be cut off, and,

when still suffering from the fiend-like deed, the mother of his present mistress had rescued him, and made him her own attendant. Was there anything to be wondered at in his blind idolatry—his perfect love, only increased by years—his total self-abnegation.

"When he returns, good Quito, I want to see him," she continued, for his mute gestures had told her of the father's absence. Then the boy withdrew, and she sunk back upon the silken cushions to resume her day-dreams.

An hour passed. The mocking-bird poured forth its rattling rhapsody of notes from the leafy crest of the cocoa-nut tree—the liquid flow of the river—the shrill cry of the scarlet flamingo—the tinkling of the silver bell, rung by restless waves of the fountain, as the golden globe was tossed about—the rustle of orange and magnolia leaves, and all the melodies of nature came commingled to her ear, soothing her to forgetfulness.

A step rang proudly upon the rush-covered floor of the hall, and springing to her feet, she flew into her father's arms to receive his embrace and kiss for kiss.

"Well, Inez, daughter, were you tired with watching for your father? My child, it must be lonely here, when one has done with birds and books and flowers."

"When you are here, dear father, I am never lonely."

"Then you should take your horse when I am too long away, follow, and bring the wanderer back."

"Would that be quite maidenly, dear father?"

"There spake the blood of old Castile! Well, Inez, what new toy shall I purchase to gratify my daughter?"

"I have more beautiful things already than I wish."

"Do you want another slave to pet and spoil?"

"No, no," was the laughing reply.

"Another horse, then?"

"No. De Soto would admit of no rivalry in his mistress's love; he is a jealous creature."

"But you must have some wish for pearls, or a large hoard of precious stones?"

"Still no, dear father."

"What! I have bought you half-a-dozen opals, rich with light."

"Father, you know how little I value *such* things! Gems are but stones, more or less bright."

"Alia! my little one is turning anchorite! What shall it be, then, daughter? Another hound, or bird?"

"No, father, none."

"There is but one thing left that a maiden sighs for."

"And what is that?"

"Why, child, if your books don't tell you, *ask your heart!*"

"My heart?"

"Truly, your heart! Your mother's answered to the question when I first asked it of her, and found her wish."

"Found what?"

"A *husband*, girl!"

"Father, for shame!" and she turned away to hide her blushes.

"If that's not it, why I'll have to give it up. But I only jest. Thank Heaven, you are heart-whole yet, and he who marries my daughter must be more than a prince. He must be a *man!*"

"Father, you know that I love no man but you."

"Sant Jago, but I believe that! Well, well, we'll say no more of this. Now, what will my beauty have?"

"Nothing, except——"

"Except? Then there *is* one thing at least?"

"When are you going to the Pampas, dear father?" and she laid her hand softly on his arm, and looked into his eyes.

"So, so! You wish to hold me to the foolish promise I made to you long ago. Well, I don't know; you may be as safe there as anywhere."

"Should I not be safer with you than here?"

"Possibly; but you little realize the hardships—to say nothing of the dangers."

"I do not fear them."

"But, suppose the Indians should attack us?"

"Still my father's daughter would not be afraid."

"So young, and yet so brave! But think, Inez——"

"But your promise, father."

"Jose Herera never yet broke his word, even when jesting. You shall go, my child."

"Thank you, dear father. When shall we set out?"

"How soon can you be ready?"

"To-morrow."

"A very short time that for preparation. But you will have to curb your impatience."

"Curb it—why?"

"Do you not recollect, to-morrow?"

"To-morrow—to-morrow? No, nothing of importance connected with it."

"You should, my child, for it was yourself that made the promise."

"Promise? What promise, father?"

"That the slaves should have a holiday."

"It is true. In my own happiness I would have forgotten theirs. See how selfish I am."

"What would they do if their young mistress deserted them? Who but she should reward the slave that captured the largest fish in their evening sport?"

"None, certainly. No, not even for my own gratification—not for all the pleasure I anticipate in going to the Pampas—would I disappoint our faithful servants. Three days hence, then, let us go, father."

"So shall it be."

"I will seek Quito, and tell him of my wishes."

"And so your *shadow* will follow you there, Inez."

"Yes, certainly." And with affection's kiss still lingering on their lips they separated, more than happy in each other's love.

CHAPTER III.

THE SLAVES' HOLIDAY—NIGHT FISHING—THE ISLAND— THE LAGOON.

NEGROES, when dressed in their holiday costume, brightly decorated with ribbons, turbans, and tinsel jewellery—with dresses, coats, vests, and handkerchiefs boasting all the gaudy hues so popular with the race, are always a

picturesque sight. When contented and happy (and does not contentment always bring happiness?) there is no song that rings so gaily, or laughter so loud as theirs. Rushing tumultuously into the dance, they throw their whole souls into the measure, and keep time to the music of the violin, and banjo, with an *abandon* and grace, that their fairer skinned brothers and sisters vainly strive to imitate.

The lawn that stretched down from the fairy-like house of Jose Herera, from the northern side of the garden, was thickly dotted with oaks of great size and beauty, and cleared entirely from underbrush. No creeping vine or gnarled root was left to catch the unwary foot, and beneath the grateful shade, and on the soft greensward, the slaves were accustomed to gather, on their holidays, or when labour was over, to sing, dance, play, or wander, as their humour led them.

Early on the morning of their promised day of pleasure they came thronging hither, arrayed in their fanciful dresses, with faces gleaming with anticipations. The grey-headed men hobbled along with hearts as young as the youngest, and talked in their cracked voices of the days when they could leap the highest, and dance the longest on a day like that. The sable matrons tossed up their ebony youngsters, with their shining skins and large eyes, eager that they should be admired. The belles and beaux minced and strutted, and made the woods ring with their laughter, and the pastor of all these ebony set souls marched slowly around, deeming himself the very personification of dignity, and the embodiment of scriptural wisdom.

Inez Herera, escorted by her father, and closely followed by her dumb attendant, passed from circle to circle, giving each a kind word—promising a trinket here and ribbon there, her sweet face beaming out more strikingly white and beautiful, amid so many inky ones. Then, after telling them that she would reward the victor in the night fishing, and that they would be supplied from the house with extra cheer for their afternoon feast she left them to enjoy themselves

unrestrained. Not that there was a single particle of fear of her in any of their minds ; but well she knew that her presence would be something of a check upon their mirth, no matter how much they might love her, and her delicacy and kindness would not permit of restraint on their merriment.

"May de Lord bress de missus and massa," was the fervent prayer of every lip. "Dey is good to us, and dey will git dar reward in de land of Canaan."

"Dey am de flower of de yarth, and de salt ob de sea," responded the pastor. "And now, deah brudders and sisters, we will join in a little prayah and hym, before de exercises of de day begins."

Kneeling upon the emerald sward, they listened earnestly to this honest man's unlettered, but warm and impressive words—a rude people, but strong in faith. When the "amen" had died away, they arose, and every lip joined in one of the stirring melodies they love so well, and, with all the musical powers of their race, they made forest and hill ring again with echoing melodies that would have hushed an organ's loudest swell into nothingness.

"And now, my people," continued their spiritual guide, when the last faint tones were lost to the ear, "now dat we hab rendered homage unto Him wid the soul and de voice, we will proceed to enjoy de good things, an' de pleasures, an' de sports of de yarth."

The sharp twang of the banjo's string, and the tuning of the violin, almost cut the last word in twain, for the impulsive nature of the slaves—impulsive in everything, whether worship or mirth—could not long be restrained by the strict rules of decorum. Now the fun began.

Shades of Terpsichore? Such reels, cotillions, jigs, polkas and waltzes, were never before known outside of a negro dance. Steps, evolving the most extraordinary contortions, were executed with astonishing rapidity. Shuffles—heel and toe. "the grape-vine," "the locomotive," "the rocker," "the fling," "the shoe-brush," and hundreds of others that have no name in the white man's vocabulary, but which mark the artist, in their critical judgment, followed each other in the wildest confusion. Rings were formed

around rivals, and when one was fairly vanquished, it became a trial of endurance between the most enduring and the musicians. The bones rattled, the banjo twanged, the violin squeaked, and the heels kept time amid shouts of applause, until, at last, snap went a string, cunningly cut by the sable Paganini to save his credit, and the contest for a time was over.

"Miss Lucy, will you gib me a har from yer auriferous locks, for er nuddler E string," said the discomfited musician to one of the coal-black beauties.

"Go long wid you now! Tink I'se a-gwine to luf you hab my har to tune up yer ole gourd wid?" was the reply, and with coquettish airs, the affronted fair one departed to bask in the presence of the victor, who stood wiping his reeking brow, and bowing his black crown to be wreathed with roses, after the manner of some conqueror in the Olympic games.

And thus the morning passed with the *élite*, while the youngsters rolled and tumbled and shouted upon the grass, and the elders smoked in solemn conclave, except the matrons, whose dancing days were over, and who were deep in the mysteries of cooking. Then came the joyous peal of the bell that summoned them to the tables, and each Romeo with his Juliet, and Paris with his Helen, marched proudly off, to take their places at the liberally furnished board. The tables were arranged so that all might be seated, and when due thanks had been returned to the Giver of all good—for religion was ever mingled with, and made a part of, their life actions—the demolition began. Began and continued until but a ruin remained—skeletons of beast, bird, and fish, and empty dishes that had been loaded lavishly, and surfeited nature demanded repose. A general breaking up followed; the indispensable *siesta* must be enjoyed, the necessary household duties performed, and the requisite preparations made for the night's fishing.

Evening came as if in accordance with the wish expressed an hundred thousand times during the day, without a single star or moon. The dark veil of the storm had been thrown between the glittering lights of the upper

air, and the moon, baffled in her efforts to smile upon the earth, hid her splendour behind the western hills. But, no mist slept upon the waters or hung its fleece upon the tops of the mountains. The air was perfectly clear, and the wind had gone down with the sun. Save the lights shining from the little cabin windows, the broad blaze flashing from the hall, and the golden sparks of the countless fireflies, all was intensely dark.

A rocket shot up from the door of Herera, leaving its wake of golden rain behind, and scattering its blood-red stars abroad. Then the aspect changed in an instant. A thousand torches flung their smoking light around, and a thousand dark forms rushed wildly about as they hurried to be first upon the waters. It was such a scene as one might imagine could transpire in the lower regions, when, at a signal, the fell fiends kept joyous holiday for a lost soul. The pitch black night—the sable forms in their wild movements and scant attire—the torches waving with their smoke and fitful light—might well image forth such a furious carnival.

But soon, as little boat after boat shot out upon the broad breast of the river, each with a torch at the bow, and every form standing glaringly out like pictures from a colorless background, it became strikingly beautiful. Like huge fire-flies they darted hither and thither, with the sable fishermen, armed with spears, and intent upon securing the finny prey, making strange and fitful motions. Whirling along with the current, they soon passed the point where Inez and her father had taken their stand to watch the sport, and were lost to their sight behind a long and narrow island that seemed to sleep like an emerald in the very centre of the view. Still, they could now and then hear the shout of some successful sportsman, or loud laughter when one lost his balance and fell into the water. A strange desire seized the girl to be a more close observer of the scene.

"Father," she said, "why may we not cross to the island, and watch the sport?"

"There might be danger, my child."

"Danger? I have been there an hundred times alone."

"Yes, in the daylight, and when the river was unobstructed. Now it is crowded with boats, each one filled with men over-anxious to outdo the other."

"They are beyond the island; and, besides, you could go with me."

"I have other duties, my darling."

"Then Quito knows how to manage the boat as well as the oldest hand on the plantation."

"But, daughter——"

"But father, dear, you will not deny me this pleasure?"

"No, not if it is a pleasure. But be careful, and——"

"Come, Quito," and the gay-hearted girl motioned to her ever-ready attendant, and glided on to where a shell-like boat lay resting light as a feather upon the tide.

It had often been her amusement to pull the fairy "Nautilus" (and the boat did no disgrace to its name) about in the shallows, and even, at times, to not only cross to the mid-river island, but even to the farther shore. Without a thought of fear she now ventured, when the tide was running swiftly, and the stream was ploughed by an hundred keels. A very "Lady of the Lake"—a second Ellen Douglas—she with her shallop was worthy to have stirred the silver waters of Loch Katrine.

In keeping with every thing in and about that ideal home, her boat had been fashioned with exquisite skill, and no red man's birchen wave-cradle ever swam more swan-like. It was long, slender, and graceful in its curves, rising slightly at either end, gondola-like, painted a glistening white without, and with a rosy sea-shell's blush within. The edges were belted with a narrow ribbon of the brightest vermilion. Other ornament it had none, except that just where the tiny ripples kissed the prow a golden star shone, and, as the boat lifted upon the waves, it gleamed as Venus rising from an ocean bath, dripping with dew and gemmed with Orient pearls. In the sunlit hours a flag, tiny almost as the wing of a butterfly, and as brilliantly bright, was always seen to flutter from the bow—a dainty silken banner of violet, embroidered with golden thread—the device, an eagle holding a serpent upon a throne woven of cactus. But now neither flag nor light shone on the pretty shallop;

and, as the faithful Quito urged it swiftly along, it seemed more like some swarthy serpent gliding over the dark waters than a mimic shell bearing youth and beauty across the dashing water.

A shout, louder than usual, from the opposite side of the island reached the ears of Inez, and clapping her hands as a signal to the slave, she urged him to increase the speed.

"Forward, good Quito. Hasten, or we shall miss the most glorious part of the sport."

The slender oars bent like reeds beneath the sinewy arms of the black, and the light bark appeared for one moment to be lifted almost out of the waters, then it sped forward like an impatient race-horse, or a shaft from the twanging bow-string.

But a very short distance remained to traverse. Should she allow the boat to pass round the island, or by landing, step across its narrow surface and so be out of danger from the fishermen, and command the rare groupings of swarthy forms and flashing lights? It was but a word, and her wish could be accomplished. Her active mind soon determined; the prow was turned, obedient to her command, and swept up the thickly shaded waters of a lagoon. On either side it was a wilderness of floral beauty—a rare lavishing of tropical flowers, and above stretched the great arms of the water-loving trees thick with luxuriant leaves, and festooned with rank moss—drooping like the beard of some hoary patriarch, or the gray veil of a nun. In the excitement of the undertaking she had forgotten all else. Her mind was fixed alone on the strange, living panorama—the almost Plutonian scene that awaited her vision on the other shore. The trailing mosses, damp with the chill night breath, and clammy with decay, swept in her face, as the boat sped along—cold sickening as a wet shroud, and awoke her instantly from her dream of beauty. "Quito! Quito! We are in the lagoon! Back! back for your life!"

In shuddering whispers she breathed the words, for she grew faint with the horror of their situation. In the lagoon, in that frail cockle-shell amid the darkness! Ah! far too well she knew that if it was a wilderness of daz-

zing flowers, if it was an arbor of rare budding trees, it was a den where poisonous snakes lay coiled, and amid its slimy ooze the alligator made his lair! Driven by the unwonted noise and light from the other side, would they not flock stealthily there, and creeping through tangled undergrowth, strive to hide themselves in the depths of the stream! The thought was madness, and she sprang forward almost involuntarily, and grasped one of the oars. But the boat was already whirling round, impelled by the powerful strokes of the negro—its prow had struck against the trunk of a fallen tree that projected into the water, and under their united efforts the oar snapped like a willow wand, and they were stayed, helpless, almost, in that vile abode of loathsome reptiles!

Brave-hearted, and unthinking of himself, in his almost brute worship of his young mistress, the negro would have sprung into the dangerous flood, dragged the boat from its fastenings, and, guiding it into the deep waters, essayed to push it before him, and swim to a place of safety. But the blood of old Castile flowed too purely and swiftly in the veins of Inez Herrera to allow another, even a slave, to sacrifice himself for her, when danger was still at a distance. She laid her hand upon his arm and forced him to be seated—forced, though her strength was but little, for a command from her was a stronger power to control his motions than the iron nerve or sinews of an athlete.

“Shove off the boat! For Jesu’s sake be quick,” she whispered in those strangely hoarse tones that fall but faintly upon the ear, and yet thrill every chord of the heart—tones that come like the wind, sobbing faintly from some icy cavern, and yet chill the soul with fear and shuddering.

“Quick, quick! Sainted mother!”

Too late! By the very side of the egg-shell bark, a dark, hideous head arose, reaching almost over the gunwale, and a piteous, helpless shriek burst from her blanched lips, and rang trembling far over the waste of waters. The negro heard it, and turning, the oar he held flashed through the air, and was shivered to atoms upon the head of the monster, driving him for a time, at least, from his shud-

dering prey. And others heard it, too. It had risen above the swell of the waters, and pierced through the dim tree vaults, and even as the girl fell back, almost insensible, an hundred lights flashed round the point, and an hundred negroes with flaming torches came dashing through the wilderness of tangled foliage.

"For de Lord, de young missus," came ringing from every lip. The faithful slaves had but one thought. The mistress was in danger, and what was their lives when thrown into the scale against hers?

In a moment that slimy lagoon was peopled with dark forms. They cared not, thought not of the pestilential ooze, or its living tide of scaly death. Rude gladiators they, those swarthy, toiling sons of Ham, but true as the unyielding flint to their love; and, like a feather, the boat was lifted with its precious freight, and floated home amongst a gay flotilla, a very argosy of thankfulness upon a tide of happy hearts.

Was there joy in that princely mansion? Did Jose Herera bend in tearful thankfulness over his rescued daughter as she told, with vivid words, the story of her danger? So, also, was there in the humble cabins of a thousand slaves; and in their rude, unlettered prayers they thanked the Lord that He had stretched out His hand to save, and made them the proud instruments in preserving their "young missus."

CHAPTER IV

THE HERDSMEN—THE VISIT—THE BIVOUAC.

THERE is no more certain proof to a thinking mind that our good mother Nature intended that the wilderness should be made the home of man—that it should yield bountiful stores of golden grain, and be made to blossom like the rose—than the fact that she has created a race of hardy and dauntless men, who, throwing aside the trammels of civilized life, and scorning its luxuries, boldly

compete for the honor of primitive pioneership. And equally true is it that they die unrewarded. BOONE trod the pathless forests and trackless prairies—explored unknown lands, and fought the savage foeman—for what? An unrequited life and a name—long after his fetterless spirit had passed the goal of earthly honors. An almost unknown grave for years, and then, when the blush of shame had mantled the face of a nation—a pompous funeral procession, vain display, and high-sounding flourishes of eloquence. But so it is ever. The forerunner is forgotten, and the wealth-seeking followers plant, and build, and scheme, where his lonely bivouac was made. He the planter, and they the reaper. His the true glory, and theirs the gold!

“I tell yer, Bruce,” began the herdsman, Glover, as they sat enjoying their evening meal, after a day of more than ordinary hard toil, for the cattle had grown restless under the unceasing torments of insect life—“I tell you thar’s signs about that I don’t like.”

“At it again, are yer, Sy, with yer brumblin’. Yer allers alookin’ out for danger, that don’t never come.”

“What is it now, Sy?” asked the third of the trio, Hamlin, as he threw a half-picked bone carelessly to the expectant dogs. “What have you seen ter-day?”

“Sometimes ther most ornary signs will tell er feller er good deal,” replied Glover, somewhat sullenly.

“We all know that, and any of us can tell er bars from er turkeys. But what kind of signs did yer see?”

“Injuns.”

“Whar?” asked both of his companions, in a breath, for this kind of information was not to be made light of, touching, as it did, not only the safety of the stock under their charge, but their own lives.

“Waal, yer know, I left yer down by ther spring, and started over thar hills ter see ef I couldn’t git er shot at er buck. I did git one yer know, or yer wouldn’t be pickin’ ribs er venison now. But that’s neither here nor thar.”

“It was as nice a buck as ever er man put er tooth in.”

“Waal, it whar nothin’ else. Er bouncin’ er four point as ever I drawed er sight on.”

"But about them ar signs."

"I was er creeping along thur branch—hiding kinder, for I knew them anamiles would come come down ter have er swim, and git'clar of ther infernal musketers, when all of er sudden my eyes fell upon er track."

"Pshaw! 'twas one I made thar yesterday. I was on ther same trail myself, only I didn't have no luck—didn't see nary er hoof or horn."

"Waal, ef it whar yer must have learned ter walk Injun most mighty arly. I saw yer track plain enough—couldn't help it when er man whars boots like great leather trunks, but no white man's foot ever left that thar mark."

"Drive ahead, then, and tell us about it, ef it whar Injuns."

"I kinder drew in my horns, I kin tell yer, and hid erway in ther bushes. It whar lucky that I didn't have none of the dogs along ter blow me. Pretty soon I saw er skulkin devil peep out from ther other side. Then er nother and er nother, till twenty of them slipped into ther stream, and swam across like so many etarnal big musk rats."

"Whar they Comanches, Sy?"

"Nothin' shorter, and I began ter think that my har wouldn't never grow much longer. But I laid low and kept dark, and ther brutes jist squatted nigh under thar bank whar I was alyin', and began jabberin', in thar gibberish about what they whar agoin' ter do."

"Waal, yer could understand that ar kind of talk."

"Maybe I couldn't. I hadn't bein er prisoner among them er hull year for nothin'. I let them talk er way, and made out ter learn that they whar prowlin' around arter somebody's cattle."

"Ours, Sy, ours?"

"Waal, I sorter reckon they wouldn't be perticular. But it was er kinder thievin' game they whar er playin' ginerally, and so, boys, we'd better keep er sharp look out for our'n, old broad horns and all."

"I'll take good care of my scalp, yer may depend. But—"

"By thunder! thar they come, now!" exclaimed Bruce, who had allowed the others to monopolize the conversation, as he sprang to his feet, and seized his rifle.

"Out with the fire! Throw er blanket over it, and stamp it out!" commanded Glover, as he, also, grasped the ever-ready weapon—the best friend of a frontier man.

"Yes, but they'll miss ther trail this time, the inferna' brutes," and each one sought shelter behind the nearest tree, resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

A shril whistle rang from the open Pampas in front of them, and the dogs that had before crouched down at their feet in obedience to their commands, now raised their heads and uttered a low whine. Before they could solve the mystery of this unexpected sound, for it was one seldom heard in that locality, the step of a horse—a single one was heard picking its way up the rocky slope, and a cheery voice exclaimed—"You take to cover, quick boys. Do you always welcome your friends in that Indian fashion? Put out your fire, and make them find their way through tangled plains in the dark?"

"I ought to know that thar voice," responded Glover, still keeping himself in ambush, with the habitual caution that his dangerous life had taught him.

"If your senses have not gone wool-gathering, you certainly should," was the reply, with a hearty laugh.

"It's Wilson, ain't it?"

"Yes. Show a light—quick. My horse has nearly broken his knees and my neck in trying to climb up to your hut."

"All right, boys. It's Jack Wilson, the head master on ther old man's plantation," and Glover began to rekindle the fire that had been suddenly smothered by means of wet grass and a blanket.

"He'll 'old man' you, if you don't make a bright light very quick to guide him here," and the speaker stood in a moment by their side, and, dismounting, assisted in the task of illumination.

"What, is he acomin'?"

"He and his daughter too. What do you suppose she will think of this kind of a welcome after having ridden so far?"

"Pile on the brushwood, boys," commanded Glover, and he dashed down into the Pampas, and hastened to offer his services as guide.

The flames in an instant flashed high and cheerily, and soon the planter, with his daughter and a suite of full twenty lusty and well-armed negroes, were gathered around them.

"What made you extinguish your light so suddenly," asked Inez of Glover, after the mutual words of welcome had passed.

"Waal, yer see, Miss, we kinder thought as how it might be Comanches," replied the stalwart herdsman, blushing like a girl, and stammering forth his words, for such men are ever unnerved in the presence of woman.

"Comanches? Are there any about here?"

"Yes, Miss, ter-day as I whar——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Herera, holding up his finger warningly. "It's only a frontiers-man's fancy with you, Sy. But have you nothing to offer us to eat? How are you supplied? Let one of my boys look and see if he cannot find something to add to the fare we brought with us." He was very fearful that his daughter might be alarmed, and so checked Glover in time, and, though he afterwards questioned him privately about the Indians, he allowed no one to speak of them in her presence.

"Venison, Senor, in plenty; and ef we had only have known you and Miss Inez whar agoin' ter come ter-night, we should have had——"

"Yes, I know, a dainty bill of fare. No matter, a little roughing will not hurt us. Inez would come to see how you lived, and she seems to have enjoyed the long ride."

"It has been a glorious one, dear father."

"Well, I am very glad you have enjoyed it, and to-morrow you will have an opportunity to learn all you wish about a herdsman's life. But see, the boys have unpacked the mules—so you had better dismount."

"Let me take yer hoss, Miss," said Hamlin, coming bashfully forward as her father assisted her to alight. "It shall have the sweetest mouthful of grass that thar grows by thar branch, ef yer er mind ter trust him ter me."

"Thank you, my good friend, but I am afraid De Soto will permit no one but Quito near him."

"I never seed ther hoss yet that I couldn't manage."

The pride of the herdsman was touched, for next to being considered a sure rifle shot, he dotes upon his skill in horsemanship—able to tame the wildest mustang that ever was lassoed, and, in his own language, “ride any thing that ever was wrapped up in skin and wore hair.”

“Well, you are at liberty to try, and I am not afraid but that you will take care of him. Let go the bridle, Quito.”

“Thank yer, Miss. So ho, beauty.”

For a time the horse snuffed daintily, half afraid at the proffered hand, then finding that it offered no violence, allowed himself to be petted—to have the dust rubbed gently from his eyes, and the long mane smoothed, his mistress standing by the while, and looking on with astonishment. Then, becoming still more acquainted, he followed his new groom, and was soon revelling in the luxuries of the short, sweet grass that margined a neighboring brooklet.

While this was going on—a sort of by-play to the main drama—three fires had been kindled equi-distant. Around one the slaves were gathered, busily engaged in the mysteries of the cuisine; at another the herdsman with their new comrade, Wilson; and the third was reserved for the father and daughter, though their immediate attendants, Quito and a young female slave, came and went as occasion required.

“Come, Glover,” said the planter, after the meal was concluded to the satisfaction of all concerned, although not washed down with Johannisberg or Lachryna Christe that never saw the Rhine or Naples—“come, Glover, now that you have furnished us with a capital supper, it is but fair that you should play the kind host still farther, and show us where we are to sleep.”

“Food is easy enough ter be got, Senor, fer anybody that’s woodwise, but yer see it hain’t so easy ter find er place for one like ther Senorita ter sleep out here,” was the reply of the somewhat puzzled herdsman.

“Pshaw! man, we did not come to the Pampas to speak of luxury. Those who visit the bush must expect to take life as they find it. Besides, we have enough of luxury at home. Isn’t that so, daughter?”

"Plenty, dear father. But this is not the first night we have camped since leaving home, and that, too, under far less favorable auspices or without so kind and attentive a provider."

"Waal, Senor, yer see I hadn't fairly thought how twould be, but I had ther boys fix up ther hut as nice as it could poseably be, and perhaps the Senorita may find sleep as sweet as ef she was at home on the Brazos."

"No doubt of it, my good fellow, and far sweeter, too."

"We hunters er allow that we can't sleep within er house without bein' smothered. But it's nature for us ter be out'er doors, while the Senorita don't look as ef she could bear ther cold wind more than er June lily."

"A pretty compliment to my slenderness, but far other-wise to my bravery and powers of endurance," replied Inez, with one of her gayest peals of laughter. "But in reality, dear father, I am but little inclined to sleep as yet."

"No, nor I either," responded the fond parent. "There is a charm, a wild attraction about this scene that drives all thought of slumber out of my mind. What do you say to that, Glover?"

"Waal, Senor. I have bin ter long out inter ther woods ter think of such kind'er things now."

"How many years have you led this nomad life?"

"Goin' on twenty, Senor. I began it young, yer see. But I kin tell yer its any thin' but'er no mad life. Ef thar isn't ernuf ter make'er man mad here—what with ther doins of ther Injuns, and ther scamperin' about of ther cattle, I don't know what would make'er man forgit that he ought'er be er Christian."

"That's certainly a new definition of the term," replied the planter; "but in your case I doubt not a very proper one. But, Glover, you must have had more than one narrow escape."

"Narrow escape? Waal, I kinder reckon I have. A man don't have ter live long in this here lattertude ter have his scalp in danger."

"Suppose you tell us a story, then. It will pass the time away."

"Ef you and ther Senorita would like ter hear one of

the yarns that is so common on ther border, I'll spin a for ye. But I never did make'er practice of talkin' about myself."

"If it is of you, however, my good friend, that, we would most like to hear," said Inez, kindly.

"Waal, ter gratify yer, I s'pose I must do it," and he told one of the common frontier stories of a desperate bear fight.

Midnight found all quiet in that lone encampment, and while the stars shone brightly and the pale moon wandered on through the ebon sea above, poppy sleep fell gently on every eye, save those of the two herdsmen who kept "watch and ward," and with them all "it was well."

CHAPTER V

THE STAMPEDE—THE COMANCHES—THE FIGHT—THE HUT ON FIRE!

"I TELL yer, Bruce," said Glover, as they sat smoking near the embers of their fire, when the darkness that precedes dawn was just beginning to break away—"I tell yer it war er dangerous ondertakin' fer er man ter bring his daughter, and 'specially one like ther Senorita, way out here. It's jest as much as er man's scalp is worth, let erlone such er beauty as she is."

"It hain't nothin' shorter, Sy. Ef ther cussed red-skins git on her trail, thar'll be nary er let up until she's in thar dirty wigwams."

"My scalp shall go fust!"

"Yes, and mine too."

"Ef ever I could fight in any cause 'twould be for that gal—thar isn't another like her ter be found in—waal, I don't believe in the world. And ter think that he should bring her way out here with only er parcel of niggers to guard her. They'd fight about as well as so many wood-chucks ef ther Injuns should take er fancy fer some beef."

"Jest erbout, and that would be ter run at ther fust fire, and——"

"Hark!"

"What did yer think yer heard?" asked the other in a whisper.

"Thar's somethin' among ther cattle."

"Pshaw, Sy. Don't be perdictin' evil, now."

"I tell you thar is."

"It's only that infernal old broad-horns stampin' erbout. He's allers er smelling er cayoter when thar isn't airy one within er hundred miles."

"I ask yer hark fer er minit."

Anxiously they listened, and soon their well-trained ears caught the sound of sharp rustling among the long, tangled grass, and a tumultuous stir of the cattle. At first all was indistinct. The lowing of the herd came mingled with the snapping of the herbage, and making, combined, just such confusion as often arose when the vast herd were restlessly waiting the coming day. There was nothing in it calculated to arouse suspicion in ordinary minds, and had it not been for the skulking Indians, Glover had seen the previous day, even he would have believed the whispered words of his companion.

"It's jest as I told yer, Sy. That broad-horned critter rumagin' about. He's never still any more'n a poplar-leaf."

But the herdsman was not so easily convinced, and as they again listened the sounds grew louder and the plaintive low of the cattle changed into quick and sharp snorts.

"Go and call ther Senor and Wilson," commanded Glover, "but don't wake ther Senorita, or any of the niggers jest yet. Thar's trouble er brewin' down ther, and ef he's on hand we won't have ter bear ther blame."

Before the planter could be thoroughly awakened to take his place by the side of Glover, the entire scene had changed—changed quick as the sliding of a glass in a magic lantern. The blackness of night had almost passed away, and the grey dawn let in a semi-light. Thousands upon thousands of cattle ran madly hither and thither—intermingling, crossing, crowding like bees when hive-robbed, while their snorting came up the mountain swell like the rush and roar of battle.

"By Saint Jago!" exclaimed the owner of all this

surgin' sea of livin' madness, as he stood beside the herdsman, and laid his hand on his arm—"By Saint Jago! but this is a glorious sight."

"Glorious? Waal, I'm glad yer think so. It'll cost yer many er hundred," was the paradoxical reply.

"Why? What do you mean, man?"

"That ther critters have stampeded, and are ergoin' ter ther devil across lots."

"Stampeded? I thought they were but playing—letting out their animal spirits after a night of rest."

"Ar them niggers of your'n worth anythin'," asked Glover, suddenly changing the entire thread of conversation.

"Yes, a thousand dollars apiece. But why do you ask? The question is entirely irrelevant to the subject."

"Pshaw!" The herdsman could not restrain his temper, even in the presence of the proprietor of this vast wealth. But he curbed himself and continued—

"I mean ter fight."

"Fight?" and the voice of Herera betrayed the intense anxiety that took possession of him as he thought of his daughter.

"Yes, fight! Do yer 'spose cattle stampede jest fer ther fun of ther thing? Ther's er lot of devilish red-skins prowlin' ermong them, and ef we don't look sharp they will—— By thunder! thar they go now with old broad horns at ther head. Go and wake up ther darkies. Bruce, give ther whistle for Rob Hamlin. No, yer needn't, fer thar he is er streakin' it off towards ther west. He knows his business, that man does. But jest yer look, Senor," and he stretched his long arm away over the Pampas.

"Look!" The eyes of the planter were turned in the direction indicated, and he saw a sight that riveted them there—a sight to which his wildest dreams had been but barren of excitement. Tearing along, leaping wildly, snorting, bellowing in fear, were that almost countless herd. Swaying like the grass they were trampling down, they yet kept in a compact body, with few exceptions, for some had darted wildly away at the very first alarm. As if confined in a slaughter-pen, they huddled together, each

striving to overleap the other, and all with blood-shot eyes and tossing heads, crowding in fear from some apparent danger. It was with them one mad whirl of excitement, one struggling effort, one tremendous plunge to escape. Hoofs and horns were both brought in play, and the rear goaded those in front still more fearfully on. The torments of pain were added to terror, and the weaker were trampled down in the mad rush for room—trampled and smothered in the press and rushing crowd, until their carcasses were torn piece-meal and stamped into the matted sod. The very plain trembled beneath the surging tide, just as the undermined shore will rock when the incoming waters dash beneath, and the thunder of their commingled cries of pain, anger, and terror, rang up like the mad anthem of a human battle-field! It was a grandly terrible sight—a bloody tragedy of mindless things; and the slaves that had huddled around—even Quito and the female attendant of Inez for a time forgetting their duty—stood dumb and terror-stricken. The planter, too, was excited, but not from fear. Glover and Bruce Weaver were alone calm, and while the former had stood steadily watching the progress of events, the latter had saddled *Herera's*, his companion's, and his own steed, and stood, bridle in hand, awaiting orders.

"In the name of Montezuma, what does this all mean?" questioned the planter, under his breath.

"Mean? That ther infernal Injuns have stampeded yer cattle," was the reply of Glover. "Mean, confound them—but thar they break cover. See! ther red-skinned cayoters have shown themselves. Be ready ter mount. Here, yer black niggers, git yer horses, and don't stand er gaping thar, as if yer whar ergoin' ter swaller ther drove, horns and all."

A score or more of painted Comanches, mounted upon their swift-footed and half wild horses—wild, master and steed both alike—were plainly visible crowding upon the rear of the affrighted cattle, driving them on with spurs, and sending their sharp, stone-headed arrows into the deepest of the press. Then came their war-whoop, ringing clear as a bell, but horrible in its savage ferocity. For a

single moment, the mass stood motionless—stood as if struck into stony silence, and then, with a burst like thunder, it parted in every direction, and the herd swept away—a very avalanche of doom to anything that should stand in its path.

“Now mount, and ride fer yer lives,” shouted Glover, as he threw himself, without the aid of stirrup or bridle-rein upon his horse. “Yer black niggers, ride thar;” and, making them follow his directions, he continued, with a smile upon his face even at that moment—“Yer sarvents won’t do any good but ter scar ther red devils, Senor; while, ef yer choose, we’ll head them, and perhaps make a few of them keel over in the dust.”

“For Saint Jago and Spain! yes,” replied the excited Spaniard, the battle-cry of his ancesers bursting from his lips, and his warlike blood taking fire at the thought of strife which should punish a base horde of robbers; and he mounted, rifle in hand, and followed swiftly in the rapid path of Glover, Weaver and Wilson bringing up the rear.

“Kerful, be kerful,” shouted Glover, as he reined in his horse, when they had reached the bottom of the descent, so as to halt by the side of the planter. But he might as well have bidden one of the dashing herd to be careful, for the heart of the Spaniard was wild with excitement; and, with a wave of his hand, as if in scorn of the caution, he dashed his spurs, rowel deep, into the side of his blooded steed, and forced him to bound still more swiftly forward.

“Kerful! kerful!” again shouted both Glover and Weaver in a breath, but the wind was scarcely more swift than the rush of the planter’s horse, maddened more by the goading steel.

“By Heaven!” exclaimed Glover, “but he’ll be er among ther Injuns before he knows it, and then——”

“Er way goes his scalp!” interrupted Weaver, finishing the sentence according to his own ideas.

Bang! Far away they heard the report and saw the smoke of a rifle, its sharp sound speeding over the grassy slopes, and losing itself among the countless echoes of the

mountain gorges. Well knew the herdsmen that it was he weapon of Hamlin, but not so the Spaniard, and he checked his foaming horse on the very summit of a slight roll, and paused as if uncertain how to act. In a moment the herdsmen were by his side, and saw that he had not stopped too soon for his safety, for the fleeing Indians, seeing that there was but one in pursuit, had turned from their arrowy course, formed a crescent, and were sweeping down upon him, even as the wolves hunt the buffalo and drive it over the precipice, that they may safely descend and feed upon its crushed carcase on the rocks below. Sweeping down, with every human form concealed by being thrown on the opposite side of the horse, where hanging by one leg only, they peered from beneath the neck, and held their bows ready to launch the stone-headed arrows without being themselves exposed.

"Ther infernal reperbates," said Glover, between his clenched teeth, "ef they'll only come er few rods nearer 'll let daylight through hoss and all."

But it was not to be. The savages were far too wily and watchful to place themselves in danger without an object, and wheeling rapidly, they resumed their erect posture upon the backs of their horses, and, with loud shouts and savage waving of arms, disappeared.

"That whar er narrer escape ver had, Senor," began Glover, as the Comanches disappeared over the crest of the hill. "Ef it had not er been fer Bruce and me, I reckon yer scalp would have bin er swinging from some old-skin's belt by this time."

"Yes, it was a narrow escape, indeed. I thought it was at a drove of wild horses. I never saw men ride in that fashion before, and would not have believed it possible," was the response of the planter.

"Its an old Injun trick. I have often practised it myself. But ther red devils know ther crack of my rifle, and daresent trust their hides within shootin' distance. Thar are no more cunnin' varments than yer true old-skins, I kin tell yer, Senor."

"You did not shoot, and yet I am sure I heard the report of a gun."

"Oh! that ar whar Rob Hamlin's. I'd know it among er thousand, and ef thar isn't one less Comanche er cavortin' er 'round, I'll lose my reckonin', that's all."

"What are we to do now, Glover? Surely these plunderers are not to be allowed to escape unpunished."

"Waal, as ter that, it's not so easy to tell what would be best. It must be cunnin' again cunnin'."

"But you will certainly follow them?"

"And perhaps jest poke our heads inter er ambush like er wolf inter er trap. But hark! as I'm er livin' sinner, ther niggers and ther red devils ar havin' er tussle. Bang! bang! how the guns go! I didn't think thar whar any more fight in yer blacks, than thar whar in er possum."

"They are no cowards. But let us ride down that way. Very likely we may be of service. At any rate, my presence will encourage them."

"Waal, yes, it's aller's best ter have er captin, when thar ar tremblin' hearts in ther company, and I want ter see what sort of er fight darkies will make, anyhow," and he pressed his spurs to his horse, and rapidly led the way toward a belt of timber, from whence the firing proceeded.

But they arrived too late. Either their approach, or the guns of the slaves, had put the Indians to flight, or more likely their anxiety to secure some portion of the stampeded cattle, had been the cause of their disappearance. Whatever it was, they saw them urging their horses frantically forward with fiendish yells and diabolical gestures, and the two herdsmen sent bullets after them, as a reminder of their presence.

Half frightened out of their senses, the negroes had huddled together in the thick timber, keeping themselves well covered, and firing at random, without either receiving or inflicting any serious injury. A loud laugh burst from the lips of Glover, as he saw their terrified looks and ashy features—their wide-opened eyes and trembling limbs, as they gathered around their master.

"Bress de Lord, massa, but we whar nearly dun gone, dat time," exclaimed many, in a breath.

"Pshaw! There were as many of you as them, and you ought to have shot every one," replied Herera, with a smile.

"Dar whar mor'n er thousand, massa. Dar whar tens ov thous'nds, an' da rode like de wind."

"Brave men, them, fer yer ter bring ter guard yer on ther Pampas," interrupted Glover.

"I believe the very thoughts of Indians has frightened them to death. And yet I have seen them leap boldly into the river, when swarming with alligators."

"I see redder light all der 'gators in der ribber den one ov den scalpers. De Lord be merciful to dem da meet," answered old Gumbo, a genuine specimen of the Congo negro, whose parents had been Fetish worshippers.

"Wail, ther whar of some use," said Weaver, "they drove off ther Injuns, any how, but ef ther red-skins had only er known that they whar niggers, I reckon thar wouldn't er bin er woolly scalp left in ther hull concern."

"That's true, Bruce," replied Glover; "and now, Senor, ef they know any thin' erbout drivin' cattle, jest let them go and gather in all the cretters they kin."

"Yes, they are better at that than fightin', I'll be bound," and the planter, after having assured them that there was no danger from the Indians, gave the necessary directions as dictated by the herdsman, and all departed except Quito, and the female attendant of Inez.

"You here," he continued, almost fiercely, as his eyes rested upon them. "You here, and none left to guard my daughter! By St. Jago! but we have all been carried away by the excitement, and left her alone and asleep. May the holy mother guard her until we return, and——"

"Look," almost whispered Glover, as he laid his hand on his arm, and stopped the flow of his words. Whispered, but it was one of those strangely deep and thrilling whispers that fall fearfully upon the ear of the listener, and curdle the blood.

"Look where?"

"Thar," and his arm was outstretched in the direction of the hut, that had been built like a bird's nest on the side of the mountain.

"De hut am on fire! Oh! de Lord! de Lord!" exclaimed the negress, first casting her eyes in that direction, and with her words explaining the entire matter.

"Now may God indeed have her in His holy keeping," burst from the ashy lips of the planter. "My daughter! Oh! Heavens! my daughter!"

But Glover and Weaver had not paused to hear his words. Not swifter does the arrow spring from the strongly strained bow-string, the deer from before the yelping music of the hounds, or the timid bird from the swooping hawk, than the horses of the herdsmen when they saw the lurid flames, and dense murky smoke of the burning hut staining the now sun-lit air of morning. With them it was a race for life, for they realized what the fond parent did not, and knew that it was the work of the red men. They understood that the Indians had divided their party into two bands, and while one had stampeded the cattle and so led them away, the other had swept down from the heights above for plunder, and finding the girl there, had carried her away, and set fire to the hut in spirit of savage bravado.

"Saint Jago! to the rescue!" shouted the planter, as he followed, Quito and the negress vainly endeavoring to keep pace with him in his whirlwind flight.

But even he failed to gain upon Glover and his companion, although mounted on a rare specimen of Andalusian stock, whose flying hoofs upon smooth ground would distance almost time itself. His horse was not prairie-wise—not used to leaping antelope-like over the rank, tangled grass, and all his tremendous strength and noble action were vain to force his way, where even the lumbering buffalo would have sought a beaten trail. Still, on he surged, cheered by the voice, lifted by the rein, and admonished by the spur of his master, while in his track followed the servants, helpless, almost, now in their terrible fear.

"Blood will tell," will it? Yes, where the smoothed race-track woos the flying hoofs, but not here, where no plough has ever turned a furrow, the luxuriant grass been reaped, saved by hot flames in the dry autumnal time. Such blood and bursts of speed are useless here, strength is vain, and endurance almost futile. A birthright on the Pampas—a youth of wild, unfettered freedom—a life education

here, and worth them all. Yet, still that brave horse struggles nobly on. His sides reek with great sweat-drops—his flanks heave fitfully, and the foam is thrown in huge flakes from his open mouth. He will go on till he dies.

"Ter ther right and take ther path," shouted Glover, as he checked his horse upon the brow of the hill. "Turn ter ther right, and take the path. Yer hoss kin never crowd through ther grass."

A single turn of the hand—a slight motion of the rein—a few bounds, and trembling, upon a well-defined and open path, stood that gallant horse; but only for a single instant, to refill his lungs after the great struggle he had just passed through: then, answering the voice and spur, he shot upward, with one of those mighty bursts of speed that have made the name of his race famous in both worlds.

By the embers of the hut, the glowing remains of the herdsmen's home, stood Glover and Weaver, dismounted, and leaning with bowed heads upon their rifles. This much Jose Herera saw at a glance. But this was all he saw! His darling, idolized daughter—where was she?

With a faint cry bursting from his lips—a half-uttered prayer to "Mary—Mother," he fell from his horse like one suddenly struck down by the hand of death. A strong man stricken down—a heart rent in twain—a father mourning for a daughter, that for him truly "was not."

CHAPTER VI.

LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS.

INEZ HERERA was slumbering soundly, and dreaming the same dreams of innocence and youth, when she was so suddenly left alone in the herdsman's little hut. There were many rosy threads mingled in the woof of her slumberous thoughts—golden flashings of whatever comes to the young heart, albeit the radiant hour has not yet ar-

rived—bright visions of what will surely be, and foreshadowing glimpses of that perfect love that renders earth, for a time, at least, bright as an angel's home.

A hoarse murmur rises from the Pampas, and the golden vision flit rapidly away—the quick-footed dreams depart, and stern reality takes the place of idyllic happiness. The loud report of fire-arms—the shrieking of the savages—the cries of the herdsmen, and the snorting of the maddened cattle, come mingled to her ears, and she springs to her feet perfectly awake and conscious to all around. Quick witted and brave hearted as she was she saw and understood all at a glance. Such minds drink in ideas, as if by intuition. The casual remark of Glover on the preceding evening flashed upon her memory, and the wildly rushing cattle told too strikingly the story of a stampede, to be misconstrued.

“Father! dear father!” burst from her lips with all the intensity of fear.

The mocking echoes were her only reply as they rolled upward, duplicating and reduplicating, until lost to the ear. Wildly she called upon her father, the herdsmen, the overseer—upon her dumb attendant and maid servant, without any response, and then her lonely situation flashed upon her in its full significance, and she hastened to the brow of the hill, intent upon following those who had so strangely deserted her. Once there, she could but dimly distinguish the various forms as they rode rapidly about, and the impossibility of reaching them on foot became apparent. But her good horse—her fleet pelted beauty, where was he? If still grazing where the kind herdsman had placed him he might be found, and then all would be well. She remembered distinctly the direction he had been led, and with winged footsteps flew along the narrow and ever-descending trail.

Hark! That sound did not arise from the Pampas. It was not the rushing of affrighted cattle or steeds rapidly urged in the pursuit. Not the shouts of herdsmen or of negroes. It is nearer—it is coming up the very path she is travelling! She cowers in the thick undergrowth—she hides in the rank herbage and watches in abject fear. Man or beast she cannot fly from them, and her only chance of

safety is in perfect quiet. A band of savage warriors urge their horses up the rocky path towards the little hut she has just left. Like a whirlwind they pass, a half a score of grotesquely painted forms arrayed in all the pomp of savage war-dress, glittering with beads and shells, and bristling with knives, hatchets, and arrows. Up they sweep, intent only upon rapine and plunder, almost crushing that frail form beneath the tramping hoofs! What would have become of her if she had remained sleeping in that doomed cabin?

A moment like a sculptured image she kneels, pale as the marble itself, and then the quick, red blood flushes over brow, face, and throat; courage, the birthright of her fathers, fills her heart, and she rises with the bold determination of retracing her steps, and confronting the red men in the midst of their triumph. But a little time given to thought convinces her of the folly—the madness of such an act, and just as the torch was applied to the little hut, and the first faint spark struggles for life, she again darts down the path in quest of her horse. At scarce a rifle-shot distance, the trail branches in all directions, and she pauses bewildered—doubtful which way to proceed. If there is any such thing as chance in this world, that must be her guide now. A blind pilot, truly, but her only one. Right or left, east or west, north or south, it is all the same—she must rush on blindly, or perish.

The sound of running water falls upon her ear, low and sweet as the tinkling of a distant silver bell. At once she is determined. By that stream her horse must have been tethered; how her heart bounds at the thought of once more mounting and feeling the free play of his sinewy limbs, as he spurns the earth and carries her away. Joy! joy! to be again upon his back, and feel him speeding on like the wind, with his long tail and mane waving like twin banners, and bearing her to her father and to safety!

She hears the rushing of the Indians as they hurry from their work of devastation, but the dense foliage that walls her in cuts off all sight. For a moment she again seeks shelter in the bushes, and then, when all is still, proceeds. The path is a winding—often a steep and dangerous one.

It twists around the rocks like a huge serpent, but brings her no nearer to the murmuring water. Once only she caught sight of it as it leaped on, plashing, dancing, foam-decked in the first light of morning, then the meandering trail leads her away, until even the sound is hushed into a monotonous hum, like the music of the droning bee. On, still on, she goes, her slightly protected feet aching with the unwonted toil, and bruised by contact with the sharp stones. On, in vain endeavors to find her bonny steed, until seeing that the path was tending upward, she again paused, and looked anxiously around. Above, she could see the grey clouds just tinged with sunlight—around, nothing but deep, tangled woods and hoary rocks. Surely not that way ran the swift stream, beside whose brink the sweet grass grew and trailed its slender stems, wholesome food for her horse. She had missed the path, and nothing was left her but to return—if she could! But, which of the many branching tracks had she before travelled? Which way had she come? The flinty bed bore no trace of her light footsteps, and like a blind man, or like one groping in the dark, she must now proceed. That old, massy, giant tree, surely she remembers? And that fantastically formed rock, the lichens that cover it, and the long, trailing moss that waves above it like the grey beard of a very old man? Ah! yes, all was now plain to her, and confidently she hastens on. Soon, very soon, she will regain the spot whereon the hut stood, then she will be safe again. A song, a sweet song of home, rises to her lips—the words are already forming, when a sudden turn in the path brings her to the verge of a dreadful precipice. Down—down, far as the eye can see, nothing but sharp, jagged rocks, with vultures sailing on their black wings through the dense mist, and making the air hideous with their harsh croakings. Mistaken, and with her great joy stricken down with the plummet of agony deeply sunk into her soul, she turns again. Turns but to find the same confusion of interlacing paths, and a new horror flashes upon her brain that makes her sink unnerved to the ground, hopeless, heartless, despairing.

SHE IS LOST ^{IN} MOUNTAINS!

lost, and without the slightest chance of escape! Yet for a moment only she sinks—for a moment only gives way to her fears, and then the same fire that flushed the hearts of her transatlantic forefathers, when the chivalry of France quailed before the fierce charge of the forest of lances, and "*Dennis Montjoy*" was drowned in the battle-cry of "*Lo jo! and close Spain!*" rose within her heart, and she became calm and renewed her search.

Oh! but it was brave to see a young creature so tenderly nurtured—one cradled in luxury and reared amid ease, thus showing forth the pure gold of womanhood—rising superior to the accidents of the hour—the sickening effects of fear, and the icy shadows of death. Death, for it would certainly dog her footsteps and clutch her with its icy fingers, unless some mighty power should rescue her from her perilous situation. Not long could so slender and delicate an organization, be the mind never so strong, survive without food or shelter.

Again chance assumed the reins. Fate led her blindly on, and destiny stood waiting before. Selecting the path that appeared the most open and easy to be traveled, that brave girl proceeded with a still firm step. What if it did lead her by the side of fearful precipices? What if it wound, narrow and shelving, around the abrupt point of rocks? What if it threaded gloomy woods and rocky gorges? What if every step was a pitfall and a hidden snare? She had determined to trace it to the end—had set her foot upon the ploughshare and would not turn back.

"Experience teaches us

That resolution's a sole help at need,"

and come what might, there was no other course left for her. She thought of the agony of her father when he discovered her loss, and then more swiftly pressed on, forgetting physical sufferings.

But noon came hot and stifling. The fiery rays of the sun fell perpendicularly upon her, and the thick foliage denied the breeze access. Walled in by rock and tree, the path became an oven, and the surface glowed like a furnace. Faint from thirst and hunger—worn out in body and tormented in mind, Inez Herrera still staggered on, hoping

against hope—straining her eyes to see and her ears to hear. But the necessity of husbanding her strength forced itself upon her, and when at length she came to where a little stream trickled from the rock—a silver thread, woven by the hand of nature amid the green moss—she threw herself by its side, and drank a draught of sweet refreshment—almost of content and hope—an almost nepenthean draught of rest and of safety.

But even there, travel-worn and mentally tortured as she was, it was not permitted her to rest. A stir in the thicket near at hand startles her, and well, oh! how well she remembers one of the stories Glover had told her—a story of one wandering like her in the labyrinthian ways of the mountains—of the wild beasts that drank from the opposite side of the same little creek, with eyes of blood glaring with anger—with snapping jaws and vibrating tail, as they crouched for the fatal spring—of the serpents that trailed their slimy folds over him while sleeping, and blew their rank, poisonous breath in his face; and all the vast multitudes of insects that sting sharply and render night hideous.

The new terror causes her to start wildly forward again, with the rich life blood running purely through her veins—to plunge madly into the rugged path, and to wander hopelessly on until, exhausted, she sank to the earth, with the night shadows gathering thickly around.

May the God that ever guards innocence, look down upon her in mercy, and send His holy angels to protect her from the countless dangers of that lone mountain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEARCH—THE HERMIT OF THE COLORADO HILLS— A FAMILIAR SPIRIT.

VIOLENT fires soon burn out, and firm natures, like that of Jose Herera, are prompt to recover from a sudden shock when there is any demand for action. Like a strong

swimmer buffeting the waves, when one billow more mighty than the rest hurls him back and threatens to engulf him, while the next moment he rises upon their crest and dashes boldly on, so was it with the sorrow-stricken planter. He bowed, heart-stricken, but to rise superior to the harsh decrees of fate, and find in action relief from the tortures that wrung his soul. His first thought, that his darling child had perished in the flames, was soon dispelled by the words of the herdsman, Glover; then from the chaos of his soul sprang, silver-winged, the angel of hope. His daughter was alive—human energy might yet save her.

"Glover! Glover! in God's name what shall we do?" burst from the bereaved father, in the intensity of his agony.

"Do, Senor? Thar is but one thing ter do, and that is ter follow."

"Follow? There is not the slightest appearance of a trail."

"Waal, we must do ther best we kin. Yer overseer, Wilson, and ther niggers kin stay here and tend ther cattle, while you and me go on ther search."

"But Wilson has not arrived yet, and I suppose is already at the task of collecting them."

"Waal, Bruce can ride that thar way, and jest let him know. and then——"

"Had he better not stay and direct matters?"

"Jest as yer honor thinks best. Ef I can't find ther trail, thar will be no use of any other man's er goin', I can tell yer. Yes, Bruce, s'pose yer stay. Ther niggers hain't no good any way, and it'll need some one used ter these Pampas to keep them thar critters in order."

So it was settled, and the planter and Glover separated, striking at once in the direction of the Colorado Hills. The planter had changed horses with Bruce Weaver, so as to have one comparatively fresh and accustomed to the rough roads and tangled grass, and they rapidly passed over the miles, but without gaining the slightest clue to the object they had undertaken. Very short had been their rests during the day, and now, as they rose from the plain, upon the first slopes of the hill side, the sun was

tinging the scene around with its last beams. A poetic mind would have lingered there, and watched the flickering light as it shone over the wide-spread Pampas, and skimmed down through the leafy bowers; but men on an errand like theirs seldom pause to gaze upon the beauties of a landscape, or refresh their eyes with the glories of a setting sun.

"Er mighty hard ride we've had, Senor," said Glover, as he paused by the side of a brook, and allowed his horse to drink freely. It was a silver thread of water, woven in the dark, grey rocks, and falling into a natural basin, where it sparkled and shone in the sunlight like a bed of diamonds—clear as crystal, and cool, almost, as when it leaped to light from the deep caverns above, but its limpid beauty passed unheeded by those anxious men.

"It has been so, indeed, Glover, and all for what? As yet, we have found no trace of my dear one."

"It haint ter be reckoned that thar red-skins would stop short of ther hills, no how. I allowed that we should find some sort of er trail here about, and—what in the name of thunder is that?"

The eyes of the planter followed the directing finger of the herdsman, and saw standing upon a point of rocks directly above them, and commanding a view of the entire Pampas, a human figure.

"Heaven and arth, it is the HERMIT OF THE COLORADO HILLS!" whispered Glover, with visible emotion, for, like all of his class, he was deeply imbued with superstitious fear.

"Hermit or devil, I do not fear him," replied the planter, preparing to ascend.

"Don't yer go—don't yer go! He is ther devil, sure enough. I've hern tell of him often, though I never saw him erfore," and the herdsman laid his strong hand on the Spaniard's bridle-rein, and forced the horse to stop.

There was something in the attire and position of the sudden apparition, that might have aroused the suspicions of even a more educated man than Glover. The figure, revealed as it was by the semi-light, and standing out from the dark background, appeared unnaturally tall,

"With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies."

Long hair, swept backward by the breeze, and a long beard of snowy whiteness drifted upon the bosom. The dress was entirely of skins, still retaining their fur—a sort of hunting shirt, for the upper portion, belted at the waist. The scalp of a young buffalo, with its just budding horns standing distinctly out, had been fashioned into a head covering. The face, as far as the beard allowed it to be seen, and the uncovered hands, were those of a white man, though bronzed by exposure to sun and wind, nearly to the color of an Indian. But, perhaps, the most striking feature about this strange being, was the eye. Even from the distance, they could see its intense blackness, and when a moment after he stood at their side, having swiftly descended the rocks, both men were astonished at its brilliancy. Glover, almost involuntarily, drew his rifle to his shoulder, and would have fired, had not the planter struck it down.

“Put up your weapon,” commanded the stranger, in a deep undertone, and singularly sweet voice—singular when contrasted with his appearance, which was that of a man prematurely old, for neither form or face corresponded with his white hair and beard.

“Who are you?” asked the planter, in Spanish, the same language used by the stranger.

“A man, like yourself!”

“A devil!” whispered Glover, edging away.

“But,” continued the unknown, without noticing the remark of the herdsman, “why do you come hither? Can one never be alone, even in these barren hills? Have I any thing about me—is there any thing here to tempt armed men? Is it my poor life you seek? Take it! My last word will be a prayer for the man who frees me.”

There was something so sully dignified in his demeanor, and so much of ease and purity in his expression, that even Jose Herrera hesitated how to reply. That such a man should be found in that barren place was indeed a wonder.

“Nay,” resumed the Hermit, “you need not inform me why you came. I know it already.”

“I knew — what the devil,” again whispered Glover.

"You came to seek a lost daughter—the one beautiful child of your hearth-stone on the Brazos, whom you foolishly allowed to accompany you hither."

"Then you have seen her—you know where she is? Oh! tell me," burst from the lips of the planter.

"I—do—not—know!" How slowly the words came, as if each one was leaden, and how, like plummets, they sank into the very heart of the planter, drowning the hopes that had risen lightly to the surface.

"Then, how do you, can you tell that I have lost her?"

"No mortal man has ever crossed the threshold of my habitation, and I have wished that none ever should, for has not man—— But sorrow is holy. Come, and you, also, herdsman; I am but mortal like yourself, even though I live alone in these wild solitudes, and desire no companionship. Come, you are both tired and hungry. Come, I'll strive to give you help—strive to forget the—— Come, the night is closing in, and no mortal foot, be it of man or horse, can travel the road that is before you."

"Where would you lead us, strange man? Who are—what are you?"

"As your companion has said, I am the Hermit of the Colorado Hill," answered the man, smiling.

"But that is very vague and unsatisfactory."

"Yet it must answer for the present. You certainly can have no fear of me."

"Not I. Lead on. Come, Glover. Rest and food we certainly must have;" and they followed the singular being by a winding and easy path far up into the mountains, after having unsaddled their horses, and tethered them among the sweet grass by the margin of the waters.

"Here is my home," said their guide, suddenly pausing, as they turned an abrupt mass of hoary rocks, and pointing to a narrow opening. "I offer you such hospitality as is in my power. Enter if you like, or sit here on this broad rock while I bring you something to eat."

In compliance with the suggestion, Herera and the herdsman took their places in front of the cave, the former unsuspectingly, for he was no stranger to the whims of man, but the latter ill at ease and watchful. Their host

kindled a fire, and, with ready and skilful hands, prepared a hearty meal of various kinds of game. The savory perfume did more to dispel Glover's fears than an hour's conversation could have done, and when he had feasted to repletion, lighted his pipe, and threw himself at full length, he no longer looked for the distinguishing marks usually believed to belong to the enemy of souls.

"You asked me, Senor," began the Hermit, as he took his place by their side, after he had cleared away the remnants of their meal with scrupulous nicety, and also lighted his pipe—"you asked me how I knew that you had lost a daughter, and yet did not know where she was."

"Certainly, it appeared very strange to me," replied Herera

"My means of information I do not think proper to disclose, yet I tell you the truth. And farther, the Indians that set fire to the little cabin on the hill-side did not carry her off, for they knew nothing of her presence."

"In Heaven's name, then, strange man, what has become of her? If she is not the captive of the red men, where is she?"

"I can give you no further information, I am no wizard, consequently, my power is limited."

"And I sit calmly here, to remain thus in uncertainty? By Saint Jago! but I can not endure it. Come, Glover, dark as it is, we will again take to our horses."

"Whither would you go, Senor? A storm is gathering, and even the keen-eyed lynx would fail to keep a trail such a night as this will be. Hark! you can hear the thunder muttering in the mountain tops. Is this not true, herdsman? You are no stranger here, and can vouch for my words."

"The Hermit tells no lies, Senor," replied Glover, for the first time taking part in the conversation; "be he man or be he er devil, he hasn't spoken nary er thing but Gospel truth."

"But I can not endure this dreadful suspense," responded Herera; "it will drive me to madness."

"It would be madness to think of stirring," continued the Hermit. "The clouds are inky-black, and the wind

is hurling them fiercely about. Soon the rain will fall in a deluge. I tell you, no living thing can track the Pampas."

"But think of my situation. If you were a father, you would realize the despair that is settling upon me. I have no prudence left."

"I do realize and feel it, though I have lived in this situation till I thought my heart would never know pity again: but—" and he checked himself, as he always did, when his listeners were prepared to hear some solution to the mystery of his situation—checked himself on the very verge of unsatisfactory hints, and continued, with his voice changing to its accustomed low-measured sweetness: "Senor, when your cattle were running madly around, and when the cabin of the herdsmen was bursting into flames, a horde of savage warriors swept away. I marked their coming, and stopped them in their flight by a power I possess. What that power is, or how acquired, is one of my secrets. It is, therefore, enough for you to know that there is not a single one in the entire tribe of the Comanches that dare go counter to my will. With them, I am a Great Medicine."

"Yes," interrupted Glover, who, having recovered his ease and natural recklessness, chafed against one so long monopolizing the conversation. "Waal, yes, I've often heard them red devils tell of er white medicine that lived in these ar mountings and could——"

"I easily ascertained that your daughter's presence was unknown to them, although I knew it from the hour she first entered the Pampas."

"How? Is that a secret also?" inquired Herera.

"No; for the same means must be used to recover her. Of one thing you may be certain. Had she been in the power of the Comanches, she would have passed into my hands, and been now seated by your side."

"From what you have told me, I do not doubt it. I would not pry into your mysteries, and yet I would gladly know how you gained a knowledge of our coming."

"Our friend the herdsman has called me a wizard, not to use the stronger term, and if so, would it be strange if I had familiar spirits who attended upon me?"

"Certainly not : whatever others may do, I 've no fear."

"Education dispels these brain-phantoms, even as the light of morning does the heavy mists of night. You wonder at my words. Well, I was"—but again he checked his speech, and applying a whistle to his lips made the woods resound with the shrill, quavering notes.

"By Heaven !" exclaimed Glover, springing to his feet, and preparing his rifle and knife for immediate service, "by Heaven ! but I've heard that ar sound many er time, and couldn't fer the life of me make out what it whar."

A slight smile played for a moment over the bronzed features of the Hermit, though scarcely visible by the light of the fire, for all around was now inky darkness, but without deigning a reply he repeated the call after motioning the herdsman to be seated again. This done, he threw an armful of dry brush upon the embers, and as the flames sprang luridly up and revealed all around, both Herera and Glover started with astonishment to find a brawny, war-painted Indian standing by their side. Whence or how he came they could not determine, for no sound of footsteps or rustle of garment had betrayed his approach.

"Here," said the Hermit, when their astonishment had somewhat subsided, "here is the source of my information and my authority."

"A Comanche, by all that's wonderful," exclaimed Glover, still clutching his weapons nervously. "As much like one of ther scalawags that stampeded ther cattle as one nigger is like er nother."

"Kaw-wa-gas-li, or the Great Bear, as he is known among his tribe, is above plunder."

"Then by thunder, he's ther fust Injun that ever wouldn't steal, I kin tell yer, Mr. Hermit."

Either the "Great Bear" did not understand the taunt contained in his words, or it fell uncared for upon him, for he remained impassible as bronze. "Ask him," requested Herera, "if he knows anything concerning the fate of my daughter."

"What he knows I know," replied the Hermit, and then he addressed the Indian for a moment in his native tongue, but, changing rapidly to the Spanish, he bade

them look towards the mountain tops, and see the coming storm. They turned that way, but when they again looked around them the red man had vanished from sight! Silent as had been his coming, so was his departure.

"The Great Bear will watch your horses while you slumber. With the first dawn of morn you can proceed on your search, and God be with you," continued the Hermit.

"And you, mysterious man?" asked Herera.

"Will keep watch and ward near by you. Come, the rain is beginning to fall. Soon the very windows of Heaven will be opened. Well, the thirsty earth wants refreshment. Come, the cave of the Hermit will protect you from the storm, and his couch, though rude and hard, will woo you to slumber."

"But my daughter? Oh, merciful Heaven! oh, Virgin Mother! be thou her shield and safety."

Amen, and amen," repeated the Hermit reverently, and led the way into the cavern, where, lighting a torch of inflammable and resinous wood, he revealed the entire contents of his abode.

A simple large excavation in the rocks, a rude table and stools, piles of furs in either corner arranged for beds, various weapons and cooking utensils, were all they saw. If he had other wealth, it was hidden.

Herera readily accepted of one of the primitive couches, and Glover the other, although vowing to himself that he would remain awake and watch, while the Hermit seated himself near the door as if to guard against intrusion. But the watchfulness of the herdsman soon ceased. Nature asserted her right, and his heavy breathing told of sound slumber. Not so, however, was it with the anxious planter. Sleep for a long time fled from him, and when at last he passed the portals of dreamland, it was but to be tortured as in his waking hours.

Light was just beginning to break upon the eastern horizon, when the Hermit summoned them to breakfast.

"The Great Bear," he said, "has already taken the trail. He will neither know rest or sleep until he has found your lost daughter."

"And what are we to do?" asked Herera. "It is to

you I must look for advice. Tell me, and name your reward. I have gold, much gold, and——”

“Gold? If every particle of the yellow dust of earth was melted into one ingot, and that ingot was mine, I’d hurl it into the deepest cavern of the ocean, and bid it sink. Gold! Man’s curse and the ruin of nations. Talk to me no more of gold, or by the bright sun I’ll let your daughter be the prey of wolves, the slave of some red man. Gold! by Heaven, you will drive me mad!” and he rushed back into the cavern.

“Thar!” exclaimed Glover, “ther game is up now. Yer ukered on er lone hand, Senor, and the devil has shown himself, hoof, horns, tail, and all. It’s er gettin’ too hot here for me,” and he began to descend.

For a moment the planter stood lost in astonishment at the wild speech and demeanor of his host, and then quickly followed the herdsman. When they reached the little lake by which they had left their horses the previous night, they found the Hermit already there. All traces of excitement had vanished from his countenance, and he was as calm, apparently, as if nothing had happened to ruffle his temper.

“Here,” said he, handing them a deer-skin pouch of ample dimensions, “here is food—you may need it. It is a blind trail you are going on, and may be a long one. If my advice is worth anything to you, I should say return to the point from whence you started, and from thence search the ground southward foot by foot and inch by inch. That your daughter is not between these hills and your camp I know, but where she is God only can tell. Go, in peace as you came.”

“Thanks, thanks.”

“Heaven and airth!” burst from the lips of Glover, “but he has disappeared—vanished—snuffed out like a candle. Senor, ther quicker we git erway from this place ther better. I thought he whar ther devil himself, and now I know it,” and mounting his horse with all possible speed, he spurred headlong into the Pampas, leaving the planter to follow as best he might.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMANCHES—THE HERMIT—ADVICE.

THE ride of the thieving, but disappointed Comanches was a rapid one, and they were soon harbored safely in one of the many fastnesses of the mountains, or, more strictly speaking, Colorado Hills. Baffled as they had been, it was not in their nature to calmly give up the chance of plunder, and the stillness that had settled upon their camp was but the lull in the storm that ever precedes the whirlwind. Many were the plans talked of for another sortie, and they only waited for an increase of their number to again sweep forth and carry all before them. Very soon their band was augmented to a size that they felt in their savage hearts would crush all opposition. An hundred dark-browed, strong-limbed, and fiery-souled warriors had gathered, wolf-like at the scent of blood, and sat gorging themselves over the ready meal, preparatory to another attempt to possess themselves of the vast herds of the white man. There was a fearless recklessness in their manner and discussion. Brutal words were bandied about, blood and death talked of, and the final action decided upon.

"The pale-faces shall be swept away! Their footsteps shall no more pollute the soil of the Pampas! Their death-shrieks shall make pleasant music in the ears of the Great Spirit, and their throbbing hearts broil and quiver on the seething coals," said one of the most savage chiefs of the group.

"Ugh! Good! Yes!" responded the warriors, in a deep, guttural chorus.

"They shall be swept away as the wind of autumn scatters the dry leaves. They shall be——"

"Hist!" came sharply from many lips.

"The Black Wolf never pauses in his speech for anything of earth or——"

"The Hermit! The Great Medicine of the Mountains!" again interrupted him, and every finger was pointed warningly upward.

The warriors words were stayed as suddenly as if death had seized upon him, and his form trembled from head to foot, as, turning his gaze upward towards a lone cliff that overhung the encampment, he saw the tall figure of the Hermit standing motionless there. A deep hush settled upon the before noisy assembly, and each retained his place until the new-comer, descending by a circuitous path, strode into their midst, his eye flashing wildly, and every gesture revealing excitement of no ordinary character.

"Black-hearted thieves!" were his first words. "Carion buzzards, blood-thirsty wolves! Has not the Great Spirit given you almost limitless hunting-grounds—given you well-stocked mountains, and plains, and streams, that you must attempt to rob the stranger, and stain your hands in his blood?"

Not a word was spoken, but every eye was riveted upon the ground, and he continued: "It is well ye are dumb! Had ye a spark of shame in your vile hearts, ye would hide your heads like the sheep-stealing dog—creep to the deepest and darkest den of the mountains, and associate with all that is loathsome and vile. But to whom do I talk of shame? As well might I preach to the lamb-strangling wolf of mercy, or the serpent-charming bird of kindness! As well attempt to whistle down the whirlwind, or turn back the mountain torrent with a dam of spider-webs, as to teach your black souls generosity."

"The white man's cattle tread down our hunting-grounds, and drive——" began the Comanche chief, in reply, but the Hermit silenced him with a gesture, and proceeded: "Your words are false as your lying hearts. But beware! The evil spirit sleeps not, and he will not fail to punish."

"The red man trusts in the pale-faced Medicine, and he will intercede for them when the Matcha Manitou is angry," said an aged and war-worn chief, humbly.

"I? Perchance, if ye obey me; but you dare not do otherwise! Up from your sloth. Do one good deed, if it is in your power, and strive to save yourselves from the deep-rolling thunders and the red, forked lightning that is mustering for your punishment."

"What would the Great Medicine who holds in hand the——"

"Hush! What I am must not be whispered, even to the winds."

"But what would he have the red men do?" asked another of the elders, completely cowed by his fierce words and manner.

"Listen, and let not the words fall as the dry leaf to the ground, to be swept away by the first breath of the storm."

"Like the soft pipe-clay shall the hearts of the warriors receive it, and like the pipe when hardened by fire, and turned into stone, shall they retain it. Let our brother speak the words that are good for them to hear."

"It is well. Not often do you hear my voice, save when ye come trembling to my home in the rocks to seek safety from the fiends of sickness. Not often do I set myoccasins within the limits of your wigwams."

"They are ever open, and——"

"Pshaw! Why do I prate thus when each minute may be worth a day and each day a lifetime? Listen! When your prowling band had been driven back like a cowardly deer before the wrath of the pale man—when a little handful of resolute men had put ye all to flight, as one eagle sweeps a wood full of sneaking crows, ye crept through the woods, and, in the littleness of your revenge, burned the poor hut of the herdsmen."

"It was but——"

"Back with the lie to your black heart, before it blisters your lips and pollutes the purity of God's sunshine! Utter it not. Poor as was your revenge, yet the Good Spirit watched over it, and robbed you of your plunder."

"The warriors of the——"

"Peace. The Good Spirit, I say, watched over it, and the little bird that had nestled there and sung itself to sleep."

"A bird!" repeated all in astonishment.

"Its head was under its wing, and it was dreaming of bright flowers and sunshine when your yells awoke it."

"The red man did not know that——"

"It spread its pinions and flew away, and hid itself in

the thick bushes, so that even your keen eyes knew not that it was trembling there. So it escaped you, and well for you that it did!"

The red man would have——"

"Peace! Interrupt me not. Do you think I have time to stay here and talk to you like a brawling brook? Do you think I came but to tell you of this? to tell you that a young doe had escaped from the open jaws of the panther? Peace, and listen. Well for you it is that it did escape, for if but one of your fingers had been laid upon it—if it had pressed the snowy plumage and ruffled a feather, I would have cursed you until you howled in fear!"

"A white bird! A pale-face girl!"

"The only daughter of the man ye would have robbed and murdered, for your fiendish hearts can pause at nothing short of blood."

"The warriors of the Comanches battle not with weakly girls," said Black Wolf, proudly.

"Don't you, ye wolf's whelp, that would strangle your own dam!"

"What would the pale Medicine have the red man do?" again asked one of the elders.

"Do?"

"His brothers await his bidding."

"As the buzzard awaits the shot of the hunter, to feast on the slain deer! Do? Go, search and find her."

"Where shall the trail begin, and whither shall it lead?"

"Ye are keen enough when your tongues would lap the stream of life, or your souls glut themselves with food. Away! Pause not upon the trail. Like the eagle will I sweep along the path ye travel. Ye shall obey me! Dare not to do otherwise, for ye know me and my power."

"But whither?"

"On the mountain where ye burned the hut."

"But——"

"Be gone! And yet to satisfy your sordid souls, he who first brings me tidings of her safety shall have gold—gold—handful of gold. Be gone! Not another word."

There was a short conversation in an under tone among the Indians, and then, separating into little bands, they

rushed to their horses, for all were glad to escape from that piercing eye, and the thunder of the words they looked upon as doom! Quickly, in all directions they dispersed without waiting or caring for orders, while the Hermit stood, apparently as one in a dream, until every sound was hushed in the distance. Then he aroused himself—a smile curled his lip for a moment, and he muttered:

“There they go, the black-hearted fiends! They fear me, and I will use my power. But why should I? Long years ago I cut myself loose from my kind—tore every vestige of feeling, as I thought, from my heart, and now, for a girl—a vain, foolish, doll-face beauty, I doubt not—I am to become again a slave to the senseless forms of society. Is this my sturdy independence? This my scorn—hatred of those who drove me from civilization and—— But this young creature shall not become the slave of these savage demons! No, no! I’ll save her—send her back to flaunt like a butterfly—find how false the world is, and curse me for my kindness perchance! Well, so let it be. But now!——”

His shrill whistle rang, and creeping from behind a rock where he had been hidden, came the shadow of the master, the ever-attendant Indian, Kaw-wa-gas-hi.

“The wolves have gone on the trail of the lost doe. Go, track them. It is not in their nature to be true, but, by the light of heaven, if they wrong a single hair of her head, they shall rue it! Kaw-wa-gas-hi, you have seen her? Tell me of her.”

“The eye of the Great Bear has seen no one like her, save when he has traveled the land of dreams.”

“Is she so beautiful?”

“As the morning sun.”

“And false! Great Bear, the white skin too often covers a black heart. But you say she is beautiful?”

“Eyes like the star—step like the wind—form like the mottled doe—hair fine as the silk of the maize—and voice like the sweet singing bird of the orange groves.”

“Had you been a white man and a lover, you would have sung sweet nonsense into willing ears! But the more beautiful she is the less fitted for a home in a roving

devil's hut. She must be saved. Away on the trail. Follow fast and far. I go again to my cavern in the rocks. Away! Be swift as death and silent as the grave."

"The trail shall be twisted, and the path rocky that shall tire the moccasins of Kaw-wa-gas-hi," and the Indian disappeared.

"Cunning shall baffle craft," muttered the Hermit, "skill shall combat fraud—knowledge prove the master of brutality—white intelligence the superior of red-handed and black-hearted murder," and he again ascended the rocky cliff.

Seated there, he drew forth a glass and scanned the scene. It was one a poet's eye, or any possessed of a love of nature, would have lingered long and lovingly upon; but stern thoughts were busy in his brain, and he regarded its beauties with a heavy heart.

Short was his reverie. He had learned discretion in his dangerous life, and rising again he hastily returned to his accustomed home.

Once there, he changed his dress, armed himself, and mounting a horse that came at his call, dashed down the mountain, the very picture of a roving Comanche.

A ride of an hour brought him to the side of the distressed father, and the herdsman Glover, who, baffled on the trail, were wandering hopelessly among the hills. The rifles of both were raised, and their keen eyes were glancing along the slender tubes threatening instant death; but the steed of the hermit continued his rapid course until, drawing his rein suddenly and throwing him upon his haunches, he shouted: "Put up your weapons, Senor, drop your rifle, man. Would you harm a friend?"

"By Jericho, ef it hain't ther Hermit! I shouldn't have known yer ef it hadn't er bin fer yer beard," shouted Glover in reply.

"Well, wnat of it, herdsman?"

"Ef I didn't take yer fer er red devil, yer may jest up and shoot me."

"There are enough of them on the Pampas already without any counterfeits."

"But yer are dressed jest like one, and——"

"And of course have my reason for it. Don't trouble yourself with my secrets."

"Ef I do may I be blessed! No, no, I hain't fool er nough yet ter meddle with er man that hain't more'n half human, no how."

"But," interrupted the anxious parent, "have you heard any thing of my lost child? Tell me, strange man, if you have any news of her?"

"Strange man? Yes, I must look so in your eyes. And yet, if you knew all—if you knew that—— No, I have heard—have seen nothing. Yet fear nothing. An hundred pair of eyes are engaged in the search, and you will hear good tidings soon."

"My heart aches with this continued anxiety. Oh! that I had ever been tempted to bring her with me."

"Well, indeed, would it have been. The foot that presses and the heart that dares the pathways of the Pampas, should be strong and bold. The wing of a petted house-bird should never venture where the buzzard swoops."

"True, too true, and now——"

"By thunder thar goes another red-skin—er skulkin' on his devil's errand erlong ther mounting slope," interrupted Glover, whose restless eyes were constantly watching every point around them, and his ready rifle was brought to bear upon the crouching figure.

"Stay your hand," replied the Hermit.

"Will I? I'll send er bullet arter him that will save him one long journey, and send him on er longer one."

"What would you do, man? Is your heart bent on cold-blooded murder?"

"Pshaw; it haint no murder ter kill er red-skin."

"Down with your weapon, man!" and he struck it rudely to the earth, applied his whistle to his lips, and blew a shrill blast.

The Indian stopped suddenly when he heard the sound. He raised his crouched form, motioned for a moment with his hands raised above his head, and then sinking down again, was lost to sight.

"Who was it?" demanded Glover, with his usual abruptness.

"A man!"

"An Injun, I know."

"A far better man than many that boast of a white skin."

"Waal, we won't dispute that point, but what did he say?"

The Hermit gave no answer, but dismounting, he allowed his horse to graze at will, and lighting his pipe, he sat calmly down upon a barren rock, and appeared lost in thought. And thus an hour passed—an hour of intense anxiety to the father and impatience to the herdsman, for their companion would not utter a single word. At length, when Glover had become completely outraged at what he considered his supreme indifference, and was about to depart, an arrow quivered through the air above their heads, and descending, stuck upright in the sod, almost at their feet.

"The Great Bear has found——" began the Hermit.

"Then it whar your Injun that we saw?" demanded Glover.

"He has found the trail of the lost girl."

"God bless him and you," burst from the lips of the planter.

"He has found the trail," continued the Hermit, without regarding the interruptions, as he stooped and picked up the slender shaft, and unrolled a thin piece of bark that had been cunningly fastened around it.

"Where? Oh! tell me where and how?"

"He will follow the trail, and she will be saved."

"Ef yerself didn't say it, Hermit, I'd never believe it of any Injun that ever wore er scalp lock," said Glover.

"My words are not like the smoke that the wind drifts hither and thither. I said she should be saved, and she shall."

"And you?" questioned the planter.

"To watch and direct."

"And we?"

"Back to your late camping-ground. Back to **your** herds and your companions."

"Ef I do, I'll be ——! Ef I leave ther sarch fer Miss Inez before I see her safe, may I be rode upon er rail and

have er complete dressin' out of tar and feathers," angrily replied the herdsman.

"By Saint Jago! but that can never be," exclaimed Herrera, almost in the same breath.

"But it must, Senor. Forgive me for what I say, but it must be so."

"It is simply impossible. What? Remain idle when my dear child is—oh! Holy Mother, who can tell where?"

"I know how you feel. I know what a father's anxiety must be, Senor, but your search would be useless."

"Still I must go."

"You know little of the trail."

"I do not care if it leads into the very jaws of death, I will go."

"It can not be, Senor. Listen to reason."

"Reason, at such a time?"

"If you wish to see your daughter again, respect my words."

"Words are useless, and——"

"I shan't stay any longer—that's flat," put in Glover.

"You, herdsman, must return to your charge."

"I shan't."

"Then I must compel you to do that which your safety requires," and whistling to his horse, he threw himself upon his back, and was lost in a moment among the winding trails.

Herrera and Glover had fastened theirs at some little distance, and when they hastened to untie them, found the bridles knotted in a manner that it took them long to untangle.

"By ther heavens," cursed Glover, "but that ar Injun of the Hermit has did this thing. But how he managed it without my hearing it, is more'n I kin tell."

At length they freed their steeds, and set out again on their almost hopeless search.

CHAPTER IX.

HAMLIN AND QUITO—THE INDIANS, AND THE POWER OF
THE HERMIT.

THE negroes, under the direction of the herdsmen, Weaver and Hamlin, soon gathered most of the wandering cattle, and drove them back to their feeding-ground. Then, supervised by the overseer, Wilson, they proceeded to rebuild the hut that had been wantonly destroyed, for come what might, all knew the value of shelter. Thus employed, they forgot, in a great measure, the loss of their young mistress and the continued absence of their master, for, in willing labour, as in play, they threw their whole hearts. With merry song and laughter they cut and dragged and piled the huge logs that in future should prove a safe place of retreat in the hour of danger. But two of the men only appeared to remember that it was not a holiday—that freed from the hard labour of the plantation they were not preparing for some rustic feast. And there, too, the mute boy, Quito, and the girl, Rosa, sat apart, straining their eyes in a vain search for the lost one, watching every flutter of the leaves, and listening to every sound. And long they sat thus, now and then conversing, for the boy was as nimble with his fingers as the girl with her tongue, and habit had made them fully acquainted with the signs that are the only language of the dumb.

“Thar’s somethin’ in that dumb feller’s head,” said Weaver to the overseer, as he stood watching him. “He’s just like er good dog that has lost his mistress, and he’s er thinkin’ of some plan ter find her.”

“Yes,” was the reply; “Quito worships Miss Inez more than he does any thing else—a good reason he has for it too;” and he proceeded to tell the story of his mutilation.

“Cut out his tongue, did he, ther infernal brute! Waal, waal, its ernuff ter make er man cuss his race. Now er Injun might have done such a thing, it’s thar natur. But ter think of er man with white blood in his veins er

doin' on it. Ef I whar ter git hold of him, I'd—— But, call ther boy, and let's know what he am er thinkin' of."

At a signal from Wilson, the black mute came, and soon made known by signs that he thought if they could find the horse that his mistress rode, it might lead to finding her, as she would probably endeavor to regain it.

"Er bright thought that, fer er woolly-head!" replied the herdsman, and then continued, calling to his companion—"Here, Hamlin, jest come this way, will yer, Rob."

"Waal, what is it, Bruce? What do you want now?"

"This poor dumb critter thinks ther Senorita would be likely ter try and find her horse, and——"

"By mighty, and that ar er fact, and we whar fools not to've thought of it erfore."

"Whar did yer leave him?"

"Down on ther Big Buck branch. You know ther spot, whar thar is er little kind of prerarer."

"Yes, but she wouldn't find him thar in her lifetime."

"Tain't likely, but I'll jest go and bring him up here, fer if the red-skins should happen ter find the critter, she'd never see him ergain," and shouldering his rifle, he started, closely followed by the dumb boy.

Carefully he examined every foot of the ground, but it gave no assurance that the light footsteps of Inez had pressed it in passing. The flinty path was no tell-tale, and save, now and then, where a stone had been loosened by the hoofs of the red men's horses, there was nothing to betray aught unusual. By winding and well-hidden ways he descended, and approached a little brook that babbled ceaselessly on its course, and at times flashed through the screening bushes. Creeping still cautiously on, he at length came to a jutting point of rock that overhung the mimic meadow he had spoken of. Together he and the negro pulled aside the little bushes that fringed its top, and looked below. There was the good steed of the lost girl carelessly feeding; and the herdsman was just about to give a shout of rejoicing, when Quito laid his hand upon his arm, and pointed to the opposite side of the stream that walled in the grassy valley. Hamlin looked up and saw, to his great astonishment, standing on the very brink, a

all form, clad in the dress of an Indian, but with a white beard that swept down upon his breast.

"What Injun devil is that, I wonder," he muttered to himself. "I never saw one of them with er beard. You jest keep back, and I'll let daylight through him in less nor no time, and teach him not ter play any of his tom-fooling er round these diggings." With these words, the man raised his rifle and fired.

The report rang loudly, waking every echo for miles, but, when the smoke cleared away, there stood that strange form, immovable as a statue of cast iron.

"Scaresly twenty rods distance—or fair mark, and Rob Hamlin missed it," growled he, between his firmly-set teeth. It was too much for his equanimity, and, with an oath, he hastily reloaded and fired.

Again the echoes reverberated, the smoke wreaths lifted, and the eyes of Hamlin looked for his mark. But nothing was to be seen! No human form was standing there, or stretched upon the ground writhing in death. Like a shape dimly seen in a dream, it had vanished. This, to his uneducated mind, was not to be explained, except by supernatural means. Hamlin was certain that no human being could thus twice escape his rifle, and it was with strange feelings of uneasiness, if not of fear, that he saw the same figure standing below him in the little valley, smoothing the long mane of the very horse he had come in search of. Ghost or devil, he had escaped. He was proof against leaden bullets, and when, a moment after, he looked up and motioned the herdsman to descend, the latter was fain to fly, rather than to venture near one who could not be of earth.

"Come," said the strange figure, seeing that he hesitated—"come and take the good horse you were searching for, though his mistress has not been here."

"How could he have known what I whar arter," thought Hamlin. "Yes, he must be the devil and no mistake, and I don't know erbout puttin' myself in his clutches. Ef I could only think of er prayer, now. I'd give er ounce for er scrap of er Bible no bigger nor er bullet patch."

"Come," again was repeated from the valley. "Come, you and the dumb boy, also."

"Thar it is ergain! He knows that thar is er boy erlong with me, and he hasn't seen hide or hair of him. And that he can't speak either! Waal, waal; ef he be ther devil I can't get out of his way by runnin', no how. So here goes," and, having consoled himself by this philosophical conclusion, he began to descend.

"Come!" and this time the invitation was a command, uttered with something like impatience.

"Jest have a little patience. You'll get hold of my soul quick ernuff in all conscience, and——"

"Have done! I have not time to linger here."

"I s'pose not, fer I reckon you're generally pretty busy," and by this time he stood upon the opposite side of the horse, that, recognizing the coloured boy, gave a low neigh.

"What do you take me for?"

"Fer er-er-dev—I beg pardon—but one that rifle-balls go through jest as easy as they do smoke, and without leavin' any marks, must be ther—waa, you know best what yer ar."

"No bullet has gone through me, friend. Your aim was unsteady. The first time your weapon hung fire, and the second you over-loaded in your haste, and the lead whistled far above my head."

"Waal, perhaps it did," and then Hamlin muttered something to himself about being provided hereafter with silver bullets.

"Will you still cling to such foolish thoughts? See!" and he held up a little rustic cross, and kissed it fervently. "Such as you take me for, flee from this holy sign," he continued, with a sad smile, as he returned it to his bosom. "And, now that you should be satisfied, you came here in search of the horse of the lost girl, and hoping to find her trail."

"Yes, sartinly; but how did you know it?"

"No matter; I know it, and would assist you."

"Don't know about travelin' in your company."

"Notwithstanding the symbolic cross?"

"Sartinly not, until I know who you are."

"My name is—no matter what."

"But you are no Injun?"

"No; my skin is as white as your own."

"And you live hereabouts?"

"Yes."

"Then, by thunder, I hern tell of you erfore. You're ther man the Injuns call ther Hermit."

"It is true; now listen."

"Waal, seeing yer only a man, go on."

"The girl whom ye seek is lost in the mountains."

"Lost in ther mountings! Then may Heaven have mercy on her."

"Amen and amen to that."

"In ther mountings! In ther den of snakes and the home of prowling beasts! Heaven; and she so young, tender, beautiful."

"But she may yet be saved."

"How? Tell me quick—how?"

"Go back to where the hut once stood. Break up the company into little parties, and scour every inch of the ground in all directions."

"But ther cattle?"

"Let them go. If every hoof was lost it would be but little when thrown into the scale against a human soul. Go, let the black boy take the horse. Here it might not be safe."

"I'd rather think not, ef ther red-skins should come prowlين' erbout."

"I did not think of them—but the beasts. No fear of the Indians. They will not harm—they dare not—but hist!" and he bent his ear to the ground, and listened attentively.

"Thar they come, and——"

"To cover, and mind that you obey me, if you value your life."

There was something in his manner and appearance that admitted of no questioning or refusal, and, without caviling, the herdsman and negro followed him into the bushes, and effectually concealed themselves. Quick as had been their movements, they were hardly out of sight before the

rocky walls of the little cavern were covered on either side by a crowd of savages.

Inveterate was the hate of Hamlin to the Indians, and hard was it to control his temper. Without giving a thought as to the danger of their situation, and how hopeless it was in the case of battle, he raised his rifle, and was about to fire, when the Hermit pressed it down, and whispered :

“On your life do not fire ! One drop of blood spilled, and not only your scalp would pay the forfeit, but all hopes of recovering the girl be lost. Keep still as death, and watch.”

For some time the Indians remained as if uncertain how to act. In their search for the lost daughter of the planter, they had come by accident upon the little valley, and as yet the horse had remained undiscovered. Had he but kept still, they would again have turned away ; but with the instinctive terror that such animals ever exhibit towards the red man, he leaped to the full length of the lariat with which he had been secured, and gave a loud snort. In an instant, one after another descended, swinging themselves from vines and roots, and leaping from point to point.

“Hugh ! Pale-face !” said one, as he lifted up a foot of the steed, and pointed to the iron shoe.

Struck by the extreme beauty of the animal, all coveted him ; but, by their laws, he who had first laid his hand upon him was the owner, and was about to untie him and lead him away.

Again the rifle of the herdsman was raised, and the form of the negro became agitated. With a knife held in his teeth, he was about to crawl forward and defend the horse of his mistress single handed, if need be ; for what would not his love for her induce him to attempt ? But again the Hermit ordered them to keep silent, and remain where they were until he returned. Anxiously they obeyed him, and, looking in the direction of the sound, saw him standing on the very spot but lately occupied by the Indians. How he could so quickly have climbed there, was a puzzle to the herdsman.

But the effect upon the red men was still more startling. All shrunk back from the horse, and stood irresolute. Well they knew that whistle, and much they feared one who was apparently ubiquitous. A wave of the hand from the Hermit, and they disappeared.

"This beats all the deviltry I ever saw," whispered Hamlin to the negro, "and yer don't catch me in such company any longer than——"

"Get the horse now, and hasten back to your friends," was whispered in his ear, and he sprang to his feet as if serpent-stung, and saw the Hermit standing beside him.

"How ther devil did yer come here?" he stammered, in astonishment, not unmixed with fear.

"No matter. He who knows the mountains, can find many a trail that the stranger knows nothing of. Do as I tell you. But be careful, for the Indians you have just seen will search every inch of the woods. Go, and—hark——"

Another whistled call, totally unlike his own, arrested his words. Thrice it was repeated, and then he continued: "Go; I am called. Yet—stay," and he answered the signal.

There was a flutter in the air—something like the flight of a bird—and a tiny slipper fell at their feet, standing as they then did in the open ground. Quick as thought the negro had picked it up, pressed it to his lips, and hid it in his bosom.

"It is ther slipper of ther Senorita!" exclaimed the herdsman.

"It is."

"But how came it here?"

"That matters not. Do as you have been told. Go; we shall meet again," and he quickly departed.

"By thunder!" was the exclamation of the herdsman, "I wouldn't trust myself erlone with that thar man in the dark, fer all ther gold in ther world. Come, boy, I'm going ter git out of this, jest as quick as possible."

Hastening on the homeward trail, they had nearly reached the hut, when, in passing through a dense thicket, a band of Indians sprang upon them, and, before they had

time to make the slightest defence, they were bound, and rapidly led away.

"I'd give er dollar jest now fer that ar Hermit, even though he whar ther devil," whispered Hamlin to poor Quito, who was trembling in every limb.

As if his words had power to call up spirits, the wish had scarcely been uttered, before, standing in their very path, he saw the Hermit, with his tall form drawn to its utmost height, and his hands waving threateningly.

"Here are yer imps ergain!" shouted Hamlin. "Ef yer have any power, jest unbind my hands, and let me have a dash at ther red rascals."

"How long will ye tempt my anger! How long will ye dare disobey my will? Once more and I will call down the curses of the great Manitou!" thundered the Hermit; but his words were apparently lost upon the air, for no sooner had he appeared than the Indians slunk away like whipped dogs.

"Once more go," continued he to the herdsman.

"And may I not send er bullet after ther skulkin' thieves?"

"No! When the hour comes—if ever it does come—they will find a power to punish far more potent than lead or steel. Go, and let your friends take the trail."

"But ef ther red devils should come ergain?"

"In the hour of your greatest danger I will be near, and——"

"Thar goes that ar whistle again."

"Remember!" and once more the Hermit disappeared, and Hamlin, followed by Quito, leading the horse of Inez, hastened to the hut.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

LONG Inez Herera lay insensible in the dense thickets of the mountains. The shadows were thick, and the night air heavy when she fell exhausted and lost to everything around. The stars peeped through the rifts of the sky, and the moon crept toward the zenith, and yet their light was but dimly filtered down through the dense foliage. There was many a stealthy foot creeping through the forest around her—many a beast searching for prey—if not savages for plunder and scalps, but she knew nothing of their presence. Nature had been far too much overtaxed to keep watch and ward, and she lay helpless as a child, in the keeping of the angels only. During the hours of garish day she had flown from even the suspicion of danger, but now, when it was around her in every form at which her soul would have shrunk, she had neither knowledge or fear. But is not innocence and purity, at such times, in better keeping than any of earth? Are not these words true?

“ Oh, watch ye well by daylight,
By daylight ye may fear,
But keep no watch in darkness,
For angels then are near.”

It was early morning when she awoke from her strange rest, and wild troubled dreams. Dimly could she see around. Weakened by exertion, faint from hunger, and excited by fear, she saw in every object something to dread. The trunks of the trees changed into grim warriors—the branches into arms holding tomahawk and knife, and the bushes into beasts of prey.

What should she do? To attempt any movement would only be to encounter new dangers. But could she, chilled as she was, faint with hunger and parched with thirst, remain? If death was to be her portion what matter where it found her? But to die thus, away from home, father, friends—die alone in the wilderness, without

one kind hand to close her eyes and compose her limbs—die where her unburied bones would be the playthings of ferocious beasts and foul birds, and where the serpent might coil among them and make its nest amid her hair! The thought was horrible! A groan escaped her, and then she breathed fervent aspirations to Him who holds the thunderbolt in His hands, and tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.

Hark! Is it the tramp of men or horses that comes to her ear! The heavy tread of some giant beast forcing its way through the bushes! What is the sound that breaks upon her devotions, crushing all hope beneath the nether mill-stone of coming doom? Hark! With deep and labored breath something is ascending the very path upon which she lies, numbed again with fear—unable, comparatively, to stir hand or foot, although life hung upon the movement. A moment of suspense—an instant when all of life and death was condensed into the shortest movement of the hand upon the dial, and her worst fears are realized.

There, directly before her, and but a few feet distant, stood a huge bear, gaunt from hunger, and eager in its search for food!

Slowly, with its muzzle bent down, and snuffing the ground, with its small eyes flashing like red stars in the misty light—with its huge jaws open, and its hot breath forced like rushing steam through the long teeth, it came, intent only on its hungry errand, and utterly devoid of fear. Woe to any living thing that crosses its path! Giant in its strength—blood-thirsty and savage, it could have pulled down a buffalo, and with one stroke of its long claws have disemboweled it. Thus far it had failed to see the trembling girl, partially screened by the bushes, crouched close to the earth in deadly terror. But now its snuffing and sudden stop tells that he has found her. One bound and a heavy paw is laid upon her breast. One contracting of the muscles—one sweep of those terrible claws, and the quivering flesh would be torn piecemeal—the slender network of ribs be separated, and the yet throbbing heart stripped from the bosom! But, apparently sur-

prised at the non-resistance, the half-famished beast thrust its muzzle under her and turned her over, snorting in its anger. And then, like a vivid flash of lightning shot across the brain of the half-dead girl, the old story that bears will not feast upon a dead carcass, and like a new life the hope that it might be so, sprang up within her heart, and she determined to test it. To what little straws will human nature cling when sinking in the fathomless depths of despair!

Another turning of the form, a snuffing in the face, and blowing of the hot, reeking breath into it—a shaking of the arm as it was lifted in those barred fangs, and then the puzzled beast retreated a little way, and sitting upon its haunches watched as if determined not to be cheated by any counterfeit of death. For a full hour it sat there, and what a sixty minutes of intolerable anguish to that poor girl! Not daring to stir—scarcely venturing to breathe, she lay gazing through the half-opened lids upon that grim monster, haunted by one awful fear. What is rack or hangman's rope to a state of suspense like that!

But hunger forced its claims upon the beast, and baffled in obtaining food there, he again snuffed at the prostrate form, breathed into the palid face, and with great grunts of dissatisfaction, shuffled his huge form down the winding path and disappeared. For a time she listened, and when all was still such a prayer as might have burst from the lips of the faithless one who attempted to walk upon the waters, was breathed; she struggled to her feet, and leaning against a tree strove to recall her scattered and sorely-tried faculties.

It was now fast growing light. Moon and stars had disappeared—the black ocean of clouds from which the golden sun is born had faded into grey, and the grey into faint streaks of violet, crimson, and blue. The grand old rocks resumed their usual appearance, and no longer assumed, to her fancy, the forms of grim warriors, or the trunks and little clumps of bushes those of wild beasts. The blessed sunshine had driven away all the phantoms conjured by night, and her mind, cleared thus from

phantasmagoric brain-pictures, calmly reflected upon her situation.

"Water—food," cried out nature in accents that could not be misunderstood. The pangs that had been driven away, for a time, by the presence of that huge beast, now returned with tenfold power, and would not be denied. These two things she must have—and at once! If she failed in procuring them—what then? Heart, soul, brain gave back the fearful answer in the single word—*Death!*

Up and away, nerved by despair—forced forward by the fiend-like cravings, she starts, ready almost to brave the fury of the wild beasts—to rush in their dens or fling herself from the dizzy precipice, and find an end alike to torture and to life among the jagged rocks or the foaming waters below. If the golden cord must be sundered, why must she so long bear the agony of its parting? Why may not the pitcher be broken at once, and lie shattered in ruins beside the well? Faint and foot-sore, for now her remaining slipper was lost, she staggers on—on, but whither? Staggers, clutching to every branch and shrub for support, until she again reaches a spot where the limpid water gushing from the hoary rock, pure, and to her, as life-saving as that which followed the wand of the prophet.

Water! Cooling is it to lip and heart! Cool to throbbing pulse and fever-flushed brow. Oh! what a "shock of pleasure" did it send through the entire frame that, stretched once more on the grassy brink, breathed prayers of thankfulness. Water, blessed water, was found—and now food. Alas! how could she, the child of luxury and ease, hope to procure it in that inhospitable region!

A little flower—a very star of earth as the stars are the flowers of heaven—beautiful in texture, rosy in coloring, and exquisite in perfume, grew near where she lay, bending its lips as if it also would quaff the crystal tide. She reaches to pluck it. It brought her back again to the gardens on the Brazos—to the Eden-home of her childhood, where the poorest slave daily threw away, and the dogs spurned food that to her were worth more now than all the treasures of earth—worth a human life. Growing, as

The pretty blossom did, in the heart of the forest, it was a connecting link between her and home and plenty. Ah! it speaks to her in a language that caused the tears to start. She would pluck it—press it to her lips—cherish it in her bosom—and thus, even in death, not be entirely separated from all she had loved—from all that was bright and beautiful. Her hand, delicate always, but now emaciated and rendered semi-transparent by suffering, lingered as it touched the slender stalk, and even as it did so, a bee laden with its honeyed sweets sprang from the fragrant chalice, and soaring high, hastened, singing its song of perfect contentment, homewards.

Bees do not rifle flowers, and fly swiftly away, unless there is a hive at no great distance, and when the hive is there, also, is the treasured honey. Thus she thought, and watching until another and another toiler came and departed, she marked the course they took, and followed as well as she was able. But suddenly as she journeyed wearily on, near the brow of a hill, she saw a sight, in the little valley that lay at her feet, that caused all the hopeful blood in her heart to flow back again, and become cold as ice, and bitter as gall. Seated there, were more than a dozen savages—war-painted and fully armed! Around a little fire they were gathered, and upon the glowing coals was broiling the flesh of a deer, the remnant of whose carcass hung upon a tree near at hand. On one side, also piled upon pieces of bark was a great store of honeycomb dripping its luscious sweetness in golden drops around—the true balm of a thousand flowers! Without daring to stir, (for it would have been a surmise far beyond reason for her to have thought that the savage Comanches who had stampeded her father's cattle, and burned the lone hut on the mountain side, could, by any possibility, have been upon a friendly search for her—not knowing aught of the Hermit or his power,) she sank into the concealment of the bushes, overpowered as much by the savory fumes of the cooking venison as the fear of discovery. Sank to remain hid until they had gorged themselves with half-raw food, and again departed in search of her—her who could easily have thrown a pebble into their midst. But thus

does fate play at cross purposes with us all through life, making man a shuttlecock of fortune, and the slave of circumstances. Yes, truly—

“Fate is above us all :

We struggle, but what matters our endeavor ?

Our doom is gone beyond our own recall :

May we deny or mitigate it ?—Never !”

At liberty once more, by their departure, to proceed, Inez Herrera bounded rather than walked down the little slope, and soon was satisfying her hunger in a manner that but a few days before her delicate nature and fastidious taste and education would have revolted at. No need of costly dishes and silver cutlery now ! None of appetite provoking spices or viands dressed and garnished to tempt the eye as well as the palate. A broken knife left by the Indians—a slice of venison cut from the haunch—a bed of glowing coals—ashes for seasoning—great flakes of lucent honeycomb for dessert, and a draught of cool water, made the most delicious meal her lips ever tasted.

Yes, oh Shakespeare, thou wert right in this as in all things :—“Our stomachs will make what’s homely, savory,” and though the whiteness of famine was still in her cheeks, and want and suffering stared wildly from her eyes, blanching their blackness, yet, when her meal was finished, the bright-plumed angel of hope again nestled in her heart, and folded its silver pinions as if it would never wander more.

A short time given to rest—a hasty preparation of a small supply of food to carry with her—a binding up of her delicate feet as well as it was possible with a portion of her dress cut off for that purpose, and again she prepared to depart. But with the resolution came the startling and ever-returning question—whither ? All directions were alike to her—every point of the compass the same, to one thus lost. And if she must pass another night in the woods, were it not better that she should remain where the means of life were already at hand ? There, at least, she would be secure from starvation. Would those

searching for her, as search they would, not be more likely to find her if she remained in one place than if she continued to wander? Ah! but would not the savage red man, also, return to reclaim the meat and honey they had left? This was the single thought—the drop of gall that poisoned the cup and turned all those hopeful thoughts to ashes.

But who could tell how long she might remain there undiscovered? How long before the wide regions of the mountains could be searched so as to find her? If she could only reach the Pampas, could she not track the vast herd and so reach the herdsmen? There was wisdom in the conclusion, she thought, and was about to put it in execution, when again she was startled from her sweet repose by the crashing of branches, and the peculiar puffing of breath that told her a bear was coming to keep her company if she remained. But this she was little disposed to do. She had already assuaged her hunger, and, with footsteps quickened by fear, she darted away, leaving the grim beast to perform the table ceremonies alone and after his own fashion.

She treads the woods rapidly, keeping only in mind that in order to reach the grassy plains where the cattle fed she must ever descend. Not for a single instant does she allow herself to press a trail leading upwards. True it is she cannot see—true she does not know where she will again be overtaken by night; and joy indeed it was to her heart, when, just as the sun was setting, she sees stretched before her one of those great, grassy oceans, glittering with crests of gold and deep emerald hollows between the fluctuating billows. Yes, there in all its gorgeous and ever-changing beauty is the Pampas! There, smiling almost under her feet, and yet miles away by the serpent-like path she will be forced to travel, even if her strength will bear her so far.

The sharp cry of the panther, the long howl of the wolf, and the rustle of the night-birds filled her ears as she at length emerged from the thick woods and stood upon the little treeless slope that was the dividing line between the mountain and plain. But now she had reached the goal

of her hopes—now that the promised land was spread out before her, fair as ever glittered in the Patriarch's dream—she dared not proceed. The Aladdin-lamp of hope showed her the plains she had thirsted to see, but the dark Genii of Fear stood frowning on the threshold, and warned her back. If she became lost in them—bewildered in the pathless wilds—then, indeed, the door of safety would be shut against her for ever.

Hark! That is surely a familiar sound—a sound bringing with it almost home-music. No beast or bird ever uttered that. It is the lowing of cattle—lowing as they ever do when returning at night, either for milking or herding. They must be those of her father, and if she could but track them she would soon find friends. But miles of that grassy sea swell between, and how could she, already worn out, hope to penetrate the tangled web? Yet night is near, and she must decide, and that quickly. In her resolution must be mingled no doubt, for the black curtain of shadows will not linger in its descending to shut out the bright-eyed sun, even for one so apparently abandoned to destitution. Shall she pass another night exposed to the wild beasts and equally wild savages in the mountains, or tempt the unknown dangers of the Pampas? Death cannot spread its snares more thickly in front than behind.

A ringing shout—a long echoing yell rises from the heights above, and her resolve is taken and acted upon in an instant. Rather death there than by the hands of the red man. Rather tempt unknown dangers than long-protracted torture. At once she passes over the slight distinguishing line, flees from the mountains, and is lost in the high and tangled grass of the Pampas.

CHAPTER XI.

SURPRISES.

HERERA the almost despairing and heart-broken planter, accompanied by his faithful herdsman, Glover, attempted to follow the trail of the Hermit when he suddenly left them, but soon found it impossible. The paths, doubling on themselves and broken up with rocks, gave no clue to his course, and after much wandering they were completely at a loss as to what was best to be done.

"Thar is but one way, Signor, that I kin think of, and that is ter go back ergin ter whar ther hut stood, see if we kin larn anything, and take er new start," said Glover.

"It may be, probably is for the best, but how can I consent to turn back when my darling child is still lost?" was the sorrowful reply.

"It is er hard case, that ar er fact, but what else is thar left for us to do?"

"Nothing—alas, nothing!"

"Yer see we can't foller that ar Hermit no more than yer could ther trail of er mole under ground, and so——"

"You are right. We will go. God in his mercy grant that we may hear some news of my daughter," and he spurred his now jaded horse more rapidly forward.

In silence they rode for a time, as men ever do when on a desperate errand, when hearts are busy, and the tongue fails to give either correct interpretations of ~~no~~ thoughts or comfort. An hour passed thus, when the horse of the herdsman, with his long, swinging gallop, suddenly pressed down a small hill into the open ground, round a wooded point, and into the Pampas.

"Thar ar ther cattle!" shouted he; "and thar, as I'm er sinner, is the point whar ther hut stood—and—and, ef I'm not mad as a March hare, thar is er larger cabin standin' now."

"Your eyes do not deceive you. I can see it plainly—"

see a number of men about it—see even the smoke, and——”

“One of them is er woman! May I be shot, scalped, and hanged up ter dry, ef one of them is not er woman!”

“Yes, but——”

“Keep er little more this way out of ther long grass, or yer horse will be down. Here’s ther cattle path, and now whip and spur, Signor, and you’ll soon see yer daughter agin.”

“I pray Heaven that it may be so.”

“Look sharp how yer ride, then, for ther trail turns quick as er snake, and goes through ther bushes. It’s only er short distance, though, and then we shall have plain sailin’. But heaven and airth, what is that?”

Even at the entrance of the little wood they were about to pass through stood an Indian, clad in his war-dress and fiercely painted. In his wrath at the loss of his child, the planter would have fired, but his companion checked him with hasty words.

“Don’t fire, Signor—don’t fire, fer yer life. Be he red-skin or be he devil, he comes in peace and may be er friend.”

“How do you know that?” and still the weapon was kept poised.

“Don’t yer see that he keeps ther inside of his hands towards us?”

“Yes; but what does that signify?”

“Waal, jest this, that he haint er goin’ ter use any weapons, and that he would speak ter us in er friendly manner. It’s er sort er Injun flag er truce.”

“Let us meet him then. But, be upon your guard.”

“That I allers am, when dealin’ with such critters, fer it’s pretty much like handlin’ er serpent. Yer don’t know when they’ll try and bite yer. But see, thar’s no use in bein’ so sarcumspect. It’s ther Hermit’s red-skin, ther Great Bar.”

“Then haste,” and the horses leaping under the spur, in a moment brought them to where the waiting red man stood.

No word of greeting passed his lips, and had it not been

for the flashing eye—the nostrils quivering with the deep-drawn breath and the heaving breast, none could have told that it was not some bronzed statue, so immovable was his stait and sinewy form.

“What tiding, Bar?” shouted Glover, even before he had checked his panting horse. “Tell us, and be quick erbout it, have ye found ther gal? Is that her up yender, by ther cabin?”

“Kaw-wa-gas-hi brings the written talk of the pale-face,” was the answer of the Indian, and he slowly drew a piece of white bark from his wampum girdle, and handed it to the planter.

“Great God!” he exclaimed, in agony of spirit, “can this be true? My poor lost child! Jesu Maria, pity and protect her.”

“Ef I mought be so bold, Signor, I’d jest like ter know what that ar writin’ am erbout.”

Herera handed it to the herdsman, but he only shook his head, and without touching it continued:—“’Tain’t no use—not the least grain in ther world fer me ter look at it, fer I don’t know one letter from ernother any more’n er yeaulin’ calf. If er feller had ter be hung, and I whar ’pinted ter read thar sentence, I reckon thar’d be no use in even plantin’ hemp fer ther rope. But just tell us, Signor, if yer haint no objections.”

“None. It is a note from the man who styles himself the Hermit, saying that my poor dear child is not in the mountains—that every foot has been searched, and that——”

“Then, by Heaven, she must have got into ther Pampas!”

“Yes—but—but——” and the voice of the strong man told how fearful the question was to him, “but, may she not have fallen a prey to the wild beasts?”

“No fear of that!” was the cheering reply. “No fear of that, fer ther red-skins would have found something—part of her dress, prehabs, ter have told about her. No, no, Signor, I’d bet my rifle ergin er willer whistle that it haint so. But, is that all ther writin’ says erbout it?”

“All! She has wandered into the Pampas, and——”

“Ther Bar here kin tell us more erbout it, I reckon,

Bar—Bar, I say. Whar in the name of thunder has he got ter! I'd swar he whar er standin' thar er minit ergo!"

"Truly, he was, but now he has disappeared."

"Discerpered? Sunk inter ther earth. Waal, it does beat all natur wher he could have got ter!" and he began looking around to discover some hole through which he had descended.

"What are you looking for, Glover?" asked the planter, who, notwithstanding his intense anxiety, could not repress a smile.

"Lookin' fer?"

"Certainly; what do you expect to find?"

"Waal, I don't see any hole, or smell any brimstone! But it's ther qucerest thing whar he could have gone ter."

"Come, we had better push on to the camp. It is growing lile, and God pity her, but my dear child may have to stay out another night."

"Yes, go, and ther quicker ther better. Any place er way from whar red devils come and go quicker nor er flash of lightning." And, urging on their horses, they soon passed the little belt of timber, and came in sight of the newly-erected cabin.

"By Saint Jago!" the favorite expletive of the planter, burst from his lips, "but there is my dear child's horse! I'd know him among tens of thousands. He, at least, is found, and my darling——"

"May be also! Now, ef she whar er herdsman, I'd bet high on it—be all ther ounces I had, fer they'r never far erway from suda er horse as is wrapped up in that ar hide," and he shook his bridle, gave a whoop that startled the men gathered around the hut, and, dashing forward, soon was in their midst, asking countless questions in a breath.

Little of comfort, however, did the planter receive from the conversation that followed. With the exception of the story of Hamlin—how he and Quito had seen the Hermit, and had been rescued by him from the Indians, what his advice had been, to search the mountains, and

how they had done so without success—he could learn nothing.

“Then to the Pampas!” was his command. “Every one to the search, except Quito and Rosa. Let them remain here, and keep a good fire to guide us.”

“That’s well thought on, Signor,” replied Glover. “Thar’s nothin’ like havin’ er land mark in er dark night.”

“But ther cattle?” questioned Weaver.

“The cattle, man! If every hoof was of solid gold, and every hide of beaver-skins, do you think I would value them now? Do you think cattle, gold, anything can weigh against my daughter’s safety? Give me a horse, and——”

“Better rest er little, Signor, and git somethin’ ter eat afore you start.”

“Rest? Food? Are you all determined to drive me mad! You may, in the cravings of hunger forget that we are searching for my child, but a father—never!”

“I wasn’t thinkin’ of myself, but you, Signor. Bruce Weaver’s nerves and stomach hain’t none of ther delicate kind, I kin tell yer. But you hain’t used ter this kind of life.”

“Not used to it? True, but I will not stop for any thing, until I am assured of my dear child’s safety. Not used to it? To horse, men!” and he turned away to give instructions to Quito and the young negress.

“Bruce,” said Glover, as he drew the herdsman aside, under the pretence of looking after the horses—“Bruce, ef the old man don’t find ther gal pooty soon, he’ll be as mad as er bear in er hornet’s nest.”

“Waal, he hain’t fur from it now! Jest think of his goin’ ter hunt through ther Pampas in ther night! Why er coyoter kin hardly find his thievin’ way.”

“I don’t like ther job, much, that ar er fact, and if it whar er man that whar lost instead of such a pooty, delicate gal, I’d see him——”

“Come men, are you ready?” interrupted the pianter.

“The boy and girl will keep a good fire, and I have arranged signals in case they should learn any thing of my darling one.”

"Larn! How kin they?"

"You forget the Hermit, Glover."

"Yes, I did, that ar er fact, and his devil's imp, the Great Bar, too. But it hain't best ter be er talking about them, fur you never kin know how cluss ther ole one or his sarvent may be ter yer."

"Get these follies out of your head. Both he and the Indian are simply men. All that appears strange to you could be easily explained, and——"

"What do you think of that?" was the sudden question, as a whistle rang from one side of them, and was immediately answered from every point around.

"Tis the call of the Hermit, repeated by the echoes."

"Echers be—— But no matter. I hain't erfeard ter go whar any other man dare, and ef he be thar devil, he——"

"Hain't no devil," interrupted Hamlin, "fur he wars er cross, and I seed him kiss it."

"A cross! The holy symbol of our faith!" answered the planter in astonishment.

"Don't know nothin' erbout symbols, but I do know he has er little cross made out of two pieces of wood, and—— But your tongueless darkey thar, he kin tell yer more erbout it."

By signs, the dumb boy related what had passed, and the planter and Glover were more astonished than ever at this new phase in the Hermit's character.

"What can one bearing about him the emblem of monastic life be doing in the midst of this wilderness?" was the thought of the planter.

"I wonder ef ther devil don't sometimes play ther saint, as well as ther saint the devil?" was the characteristic one of the herdsman.

But both were cut short in their surmises by the rapid dashing of the horse of Inez down the slope and into the deep grass of the Pampas. Without any apparent cause, he had broken from Quito, who was petting him, and in a moment bounded out of sight.

"Waal, now ther devil is up fer sartu!" continued Glover.

"Why? What do you suppose is the cause of this strange movement?" asked the planter.

"Think? S'pose? Nothin', xcept thar is a snake in yer grass, even if thar isn't er hull nest of them!"

"Don't speak in riddles, man. This is neither the time nor place for such things," said the planter, sternly.

"Then, ef yer can't understand er hint, er'll soon git somethin' harder—ye'll git er kick, fur it's ther——"

"Indians!" echoed every lip; and, on looking around, they found themselves surrounded on every side by armed Comanches.

"Now, for the blood of Castile, charge them home!" shouted the planter.

"To cover!" was the counter-command of all the herds-men, uttered in a single breath, and rapidly was it obeyed, for, indeed, it would have been fool-hardy to stand exposed before a hidden foe, and shot down like cattle in a corral, without an opportunity for revenge. Even the planter, brave, somewhat headstrong—and unused to being dictated to as he was, felt the force of this, and secured a safe retreat, just as a shower of arrows whistled over his head. But, if they had been directed for the purpose of slaughter, they were aimed too high, and flew along as harmlessly as a flock of birds. That the winged shafts penetrated the tops of the trees, and not the bushes at their roots, where a lurking foe would be sure to hide, did not escape the keen wood-craft of the herds-men, and one of them, arrested on its way, fell at the very foot of Glover, who, after picking it up and noticing that it was a headless one—such as boys shoot in sport, and not stone-armed, such as warriors use "when on hostile thoughts intent," shouted with the full force of his lungs:

"Look ter ther horses, boys! Shoot—cut down ther red-devils, but save them!"

But the advice came too late! Already every horse had been loosened and was sweeping toward the hiding-places of the Pampas, with only the foot of an Indian visible over its back, as hanging from the opposite side they urged them on, themselves secure from the weapons of the white man, for any bullet to have reached them, must first have passed

through the body of the beast. To shoot, therefore, was not to be thought of—to follow on foot, with any prospect of success was impossible, and there was something so wildly grand in the rushing, reckless speed—the wild leaps and loud snortings, that all, as if by one impulse, stood still until Glover, as ever foremost, dropped his rifle to the ground with a bitter oath, and exclaimed :

“Boys, ther game is up ! We’ve been caught in er trap like er stinkin’ mush-rat, and ukered on er lone hand !”

“No matter for the horses !” replied the planter. “Let them go along with the cattle. All I ask is my daughter. If I can but find her again, I care for nothing else. Saint Maria ! Holy Mother ! shall I never find her ! My child ! Oh ! my child !” and he leaned his head against a tree, and, for the first time, the hot bitter tears of manhood flooded his eyes.

“Signor,” replied the herdsman, “ef you think——”

“Stop ! this is no time for words, but action ! Come !” And he was hastening alone in the track of the Indians, when again the form of the Hermit arose from the thick bushes, and warned him back both with hand and voice.

CHAPTER XII.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT—THE SLAVE OF THE RING.

WILDLY the night set in, and the darkness lowered around the head of the poor lost girl, who appeared to have been doomed to experience in its worst form, human misery—if not death. Had Incz been less rapid in her movements she would have been found by the searching Indians, who, returning soon after she had left their feasting ground, discovered her trail by such evidence as the eye of a true, forest-bred man could alone have found. Once upon her path they followed as swiftly as was possible until it was lost in the Fampas. Lost to them as to all human eyes,

for as well might they have searched for a name written yesterday on a beach of wave-washed sand, as for light footsteps amid the tangled waste of verdure. From them the Indian follower of the Hermit, the Great Bear, had learned the fact, and his master from him, and knowing, as they did, all the secret paths and short cuts in the mountains, their presence, that had appeared so supernatural to Glover, could be readily accounted for. But the Indians deeming themselves safe from the Hermit, and but little fearing his power when at a distance, now that all search for Inez appeared hopeless, and the promised reward consequently lost, determined again to satisfy their lust for plunder, and having first robbed the planter and his party of their horses, to stampede the cattle, and drive them rapidly away. Drive them to the mountains, and for a time, at least, live in the very gluttony of plenty—in the wild riot of feasting—the elysium of savage enjoyment.

And while they stood confounded on the brink of that leafy ocean, the poor, wandering girl was becoming still more hopelessly lost in its labyrinths, and beyond the help, almost, of human hands. Every footstep entangled her the more. The tall, reedy grass—higher than her head—afforded her a difficult passage, but to close again and shut her out from the very daylight. At times even the sky, that now gleamed as if some master hand had polished an ebony shield, and then scattered golden spangles broadcast over its smooth surface, was lost to her longing eyes. Earth, sky, even hope was thus taken from her, and her heart gave way to utter despair. Weary and weak she sank once more upon the ground, feeling that the last, bitter hour was drawing near. Sleep came, and, lost to all her surroundings, the dark hours flittered like ill-omened birds over her head. But would their clouds ever be broken with sunlight for her again?

Sunlight and a morning of glorious promise did come. She had survived to see another day, and wearily her eyes opened. But where was she? Dimly, faintly as the sun breaks through heavy storm-clouds, memory returned. In the very midst of the inhospitable Pampas she had closed her eyes—closed them, as she had almost hoped in death ;

and now a far different scene was around her. Lying on a soft, though rude couch of skins, she looked upon the narrow walls of a wigwam. Food and drink were placed by her side, and an Indian drum laid near. Could that be the signal to call those who had saved her? Saved her, and for what? The thought made her relinquish the instrument she had taken up for the purpose of solving the mystery, and with a heavy sigh she fell back, and buried her face in her hands. She dared not tempt fate farther—dared scarcely to think. In the present she was safe. Should she break the charm, and rashly dare the future? Better leave it all to time.

But the slight noise she had made in stirring had reached listening ears, and before she had time to compose herself, the curtains of the lodge were drawn aside, and the Hermit of the Mountains, clad in his usual strange dress, entered. Never had her eyes rested on a figure so wildly savage—with a shriek for mercy, she sprang up, and threw herself at his feet. "Spare me! Oh! spare me for the sake of the blessed Mother!" burst from her ashy lips.

"My poor child, have no fear. The storm-driven bird—the wolf-hunted doe—the hungry-forced red man would be safe if he crossed this threshold, and why should not one of my own kind?" was the deep, almost solemn-toned answer, as he lifted her gently again upon the couch of skins.

"Then you are not——" she could not frame her fears into words, and hastily paused.

"Have no fear. I am an outcast, but not a savage—but eat—drink;" stepping to the other side of the wigwam, he took a flask of wine from a niche in the rock, filled a cup curiously carved from the horns of the buffalo, and placed it in her trembling hands.

"Drink," he repeated, "it will bring back the color to your cheeks, and give life to your heart."

"An outcast!" repeated the girl, shrinking back from his proffered refreshment.

"Forget the word, lady. I swear by the cross you wear, by this one," and he pulled the little rustic emblem from

his bosom and pressed it to his lips, "that no harm shall come to you—that you are as safe here as when you were in the cradle rocked by your mother's foot. Drink."

"By that holy sign I trust you. And yet where am I? Who are you?"

"No matter, now. The overstrained bow will crack, remember, and the human frame die, unless nourished in time. Drink—eat. I will soon return," and fearful that his presence might keep her from following his advice, he passed out of sight.

For a long time it was out of her power to follow what she knew to be his wise advice; but after a time becoming more calm, she forced herself to comply, and gaining strength, took a more hopeful view of her situation. As one suddenly snatched out of the jaws of death, it was extremely difficult, however, to quiet the terrors of the mind, even after the wants of the body had been supplied, and her soul was still quivering from the effects of her severe trials and recent fear, when she again was startled by the entrance of the Hermit.

"It is well!" was his somewhat strange salutation, and then, without another word, he whistled the call that had so often rung over the Pampas, and his Indian attendant entered, and at a sign carried away the *débris* of her slight repast.

"Inez Herera," he said, again addressing her, and this time in her mother tongue, "Inez Herera, you were——"

"How do you know my name?"

"It matters not, now. I do know it; more than that, I know everything connected with your wanderings."

"And my father, strange man; oh! tell me, is he well—is he alive?"

"Can it be that there is one human heart that beats thus truly! Can it be that there is a love that will survive the passage of an hour?" almost whispered the Hermit, as if unconscious of her presence.

"Oh! why do you not answer me? He is not here; you have murdered him!" and her breast heaved with emotion, and her eyes filled with tears.

"He lives, and I——"

"Forgive me, I scarcely knew what I said. Forgive me—pardon me."

"Years ago, girl, I turned my back on my home, and swore never to befriend one of my people, even if he were dying at my door. I have broken my vow, and am justly punished by your suspicion."

"Surely, you will not be angry at the words of a weak, almost distracted girl. God help me! I am motherless, and my father is all I have left to love."

"Motherless?" and the voice of the strong man trembled, his face lost its color, and he bowed his head upon his hands.

"Mother? My dear, dear mother, did you ever know her?"

"I, too, have lost a mother," was the evasive reply, as, commanding himself, he again raised his head, with all emotion banished from his countenance.

"But you started so at the word, that I thought——"

"We were talking of your father."

"Of him, then, as you know nothing of my dear mother, pray tell me. He is living and well?"

"He is."

"And near? Oh! let me go to him."

"It is thus with us all," said the Hermit, his conversation changing rapidly, as was his habit, to almost bitter soliloquy. "We are never satisfied with what we are, or what we have. I thought once that all I desired was in my grasp. I thought I was happy—beloved, that I was—— But you were speaking of your father."

In vain for a moment the girl strove to reply. There was something almost fearful in the expressive face of the Hermit, when he allowed the strong passions of his nature to obtain the mastery. Some terrible blow must have shaken his soul to its very centre, that the bare recollection could thus arouse one ordinarily calm and even gentle in his speech. Shuddering almost, Inez Herera turned away, and then, as if fascinated, lured by some stronger power than her own will, answered:

"Tell me, strange man, about my father. It was

my request, and yet, as when I spoke of my dear, lost mother——”

“Do not speak to me of your mother again, or I shall——”

The application of the whistle to his lips closed the sentence, and before the sound had ceased to ring in their ears, the Indian stood before them.

“This to the pale-faced Chief,” he resumed, addressing the Great Bear in the language of his tribe, and handing him a letter; “you know the trail, and your horse is swift and strong.”

“Kaw-wa-gas-hi will bear the written talk, and be back again——”

“Before the Manitou of night has hidden the bright-eyed sun behind his thick blanket. Yet stay,” and, turning to Inez, and changing from the Indian to the Spanish tongue, he continued: “Has the daughter no token to send to the father?”

“Yes, this,” and she drew from her slender fingers a brilliant of rare size and lustre, and placed it in his hands.

“This, this!” and he dropped it as if he had been serpent-stung.

“It was my mother’s.”

“Ever that word, ‘mother!’ I will not be haunted thus. Great Bear begone!” and he dashed out of the wigwag.

For long and weary hours Inez was left alone. The shadows were falling westward before she again heard the sound of a human voice or footsteps; then that strange man, who had made his home in the mountains, and an Indian his companion, returned, and brought food. Seating himself in the door, he drew back the skin curtains, and remained as motionless as a statue, until she had finished eating. Much as she longed to question him concerning her father, she feared to do so. The outbursts of his passion were terrible to her. But silence, when the heart is thus upon the rack—silence and uncertainty are even more difficult to bear than present pain; at length, nerving herself, she said almost in a whisper:

"You have been very kind to me, will you not be a yet farther?"

"When I found you lost in insensibility—dying in the grassy wilderness of the Pampas, my heart yearned toward you, as it had done towards no creature of the human kind. I vowed, though it was the breaking of an old vow, to take upon myself a new—that I would save you. I have done it so far."

"Then, it was you that rescued me? May Heaven bless you for it. Oh! if you could but know how I have suffered, you might feel, in some degree, how my heart thanks you."

"Human thanks are but air, and words but breath."

"Then, you do not believe that I am thankful—very thankful for my almost Providential rescue?"

"Yes, I believe you feel so now, but——"

"But will soon forget it? Is not that what you would have said?"

"It might have been, but no matter. And even if it should be the case, what difference would it make with me?"

"Tell me how and when you found me," continued Inez, suddenly changing the subject, as she saw the dark shadows beginning to mantle over his face, foretelling another outburst of bitterness. "You found me in the wild Pampas, alone, and——"

"Dying!" interrupted the Hermit, solemnly.

"It is too true. And you saved me?"

"The Blessed Virgin be thanked, I did."

"Yes, to that holy one our thanks are due. But you——"

"Were a humble instrument in her hands."

"But tell me all."

In a few brief words the Hermit related his having found her insensible. That a hound keen of scent, that he possessed, had led him to the spot—that he had carried her to the wigwan—not his usual home, but one used as occasion might require—that he and the Indian had administered such restoratives as they possessed, and watched life battling with death through the long hours

of night. The story was a simple one—such as a child might have related, and then Inez, in turn, told of her wanderings.

“Gold is purified by fire, and the human heart by trial and crosses, and suffering,” said the Hermit, when she had concluded, in a more tender voice than she had ever heard him use.

A mutual confidence was being established between them—a feeling somewhat similar to that existing between a father and a daughter, and when he was about to take her hand in his own, the ring that had before so started him, flashed before his eyes, and springing to his feet, he flung the hand rudely away, exclaiming :

“Is there, can there be no rest even here? Will the devil within me never be exorcised? Put that ring away! Let me never see it again, or I might—— Good God what would I have said? There is no peace for my poor troubled soul on earth! Will, oh, will there be any in heaven?”

“Let thy sins be laid at the foot of the cross,” answered Inez, almost unconscious of what she uttered. “Let thy crimes be confessed, and——”

“Crimes! crimes! My crimes?” repeated the Hermit, savagely. “My crimes? Now, may God cur——”

The fearful torrent of his words—the wild passion that would have driven him headlong into cursing the fair one that shrank back aghast from the fury she had unwittingly and innocently raised, was stayed by the tramp of horses rushing up the rocky slope.

“Banish all fear from your face and dry your eyes,” continued the Hermit, in a subdued voice; “prepare to meet your father as a daughter should, with great joy and thankfulness,” and, taking her by the hand, though a wild thrill ran through his frame as his fingers rested upon the fatal ring, he led her gently from the wigwam.

“Father! dear, *dear* father!” and she fell into the open arms of her parent, overcome with the excess of her emotions.

“May I never kill any er buck ergin, as long as I live, if this han’t ther happiest day of my life,” shouted Glover,

as he jumped from his panting mustang and wrung the hand of the Hermit with a grasp of iron.

"Old man, ye ar a trump! I'd rayther have yer word than ther best man's note in Orleans! Give us ernother grip of yer paw, and call Sy Glover er true friend fer life!"

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSULTATION—A WORD OF FEAR!

"WHERE are the cattle?" demanded the Hermit, when he had led the herdsman and the Indian out of sight and hearing of the planter and his daughter. Though his actions were strange, and his words at times both wild and mysterious, he felt that their meeting was a scene far too holy for rude eyes to gaze upon.

"Gone ter ther devil, erlong with ther cussed red-skins," replied Glover.

"And the men?"

"Waal, as fer that, it's pooty hard to say. Ther niggers ar huddled together like er flock of black sheep, and Hamlin and his partner scouting round somewhar. I kinder pittty any Injin that they draw er sight on with their rifles arter this, the thievin', critter-stampedin' brutes."

"Which way have the cattle been driven?" questioned the Hermit of the Great Bear, who had remained standing as motionless as a bronzed statue.

"Toward the setting sun," was the brief reply.

"To their secret den on Comanche Peak, from whence they can have as fair a look-out as an eagle from its eyrie. But they will stop long before they reach there, and gorge themselves like famished vultures. They must be overtaken!"

"Show me the path, and I'll follow them erlone?" interrupted the herdsman.

"Your single arm would do little against their numbers

The power I possess over them is worth more than an hundred armed men."

"Waal, I s'pose yer ar right, though I'll be hanged ef I understand how yer manage the critters."

"It would be better that you stay here and assist your master, in case trouble should come."

"Not I! Ef thar is er goin' ter be a fracas, Sy Glover is er goin' to have er hand in, that's all."

"But think of the young lady."

"Ther Signorita? Waal, she is ther pootiest thing I ever set eyes on in all my born days, and I'll be cut inter inch pieces and fed to ther dogs, before any harm should come to her."

"And yet you will not stay and guard her?"

"It hain't in the natural order of things that I should. No, no! my place is arter ther yeller-skins that stole ther cattle, and my fingers itch ter have er scrimmage with them."

"But it is your duty to remain."

"Dooty? My dooty is ter take care of ther hoofs, hides, and horns, so thar's no more use in talking erbout it."

"Yet your presence might defeat the very object we have in view. The Indians fear me when alone, but the presence of a stranger might make them question my power."

"Now, yer jest look er here, old man, will yer? Ther long and ther short of ther story is, that yer don't want me ter go er long with you, hain't it?"

"Certainly; I do not think it is for the best."

"Then yer jest go yer own gait, and I'll go mine. It won't be ther fust time I've followed red-skins alone, nor ther last either, I hope; so I'll pack up my duds, an' be off."

"If you must go at all, it would be better that you went with us."

"It hain't no kind er use trying ter smooth ther matter over, and palaver me like er lawyer. Sy Glover isn't ther one fer ter force himself upon any man. You and ther Injun kin jest go to the devil er cross lots, for all I care.

I kin fish and cut bait both, ef it ar necessary," replied Glover, becoming angry.

"It cannot be. We must all go together."

"Waal, make yer own game, and see ef I don't knock down as many pins as any on yer, when we go er bowlin' ergin ther red-skins."

"You need food and rest first."

"Somethin' ter eat, yes ; but I kin take that in ther saddle, jest as well as any whar ; but, as for restin', it hain't no use er talkin' erbout it. I'm tough as er buffaler bull."

"The Great Bear will see that you have food, while I go and speak to the planter."

"Come erlong, Bar," and the twain departed, and the Hermit returned to the wigwam.

"Thanks, thanks," exclaimed Inez, springing up from her father's side, and meeting him at the entrance. "Oh! how much I owe you, my dear father told me," and she placed both her hands in his.

For a moment the pressure the Hermit received from that warm-hearted and generous girl was but coldly returned, but when he had convinced himself that she had removed the offending jewel, he grew more self-possessed, and warmly returned her grasp.

"It is but little I have done—little I have been able to do," he replied, almost bashfully, and as if the flood of thanks was oppressive to him. "But more remains to be done."

"What remains?" questioned Herera. "Is not my dear one found? Is she not well? What more can I—could I hope for?"

"Heaven and the holy Mother have truly been kind to you in this regard, but all, as yet, is not found."

"And what can remain?"

"Your cattle, Senor."

"Pshaw! If they numbered ten times as many—if all my wealth was scattered to the winds—do you dream I would think of it in such an hour as this?"

"Certainly not. They could never be weighed in the balance against the fair one by your side."

"Let them go! Let the savages gorge themselves on their ill-gotten gains. Let them grow fat and drink their fill. They are welcome, now that my lost one is found."

"Still, they must be found, and compelled to return the herd."

"Who says so? Who dares to question my will in the matter?" and the eyes of the planter flashed with their old and wonted fires when thwarted, for so long had he been supreme ruler in his own domains—so unaccustomed was he to contradiction, that his haughty spirit rose at once.

"I do!" was the calm reply.

"You? What right have you to interfere in the disposition of my property? I say the Indians may have every hoof and horn, and how dare you to gainsay it?"

"I say they shall have none, if we except those they have already devoured."

"By Saint Jago!" began the planter, when Inez stepped between them, and laying her hand on his arm, whispered:

"Father! think to whom you are talking."

"I neither know, Inez, nor do I care. I am Jose Herera, and——"

"I am the Hermit of the Colorado Hills! Your will may be, and of right is, law, within the limits of your own plantation. Here it is as feeble as the bleat of a kid. I do not care what may be your wishes in the matter; the cattle must be retaken, and the stampede~~r~~s punished."

"Must!"

"Aye, must!"

"Father," again pleaded Inez, "he has earned the right to do as he pleases. Think of all he has ventured and done for us. Think of my safety, and——"

"You are in the right, child. Forgive me, Signor, and do as you please, though I had judged you differently from one who would so value a few head of cattle."

"If every hoof and horn was of solid gold, I would care no more for them than you do for the thistle-down that the wind whirls through the air."

"I thought it could not be that you were so sordid. But, if not for that reason, what then? It is not revenge, for the game is not worth the hunting."

"It is that my power may remain unquestioned."

"Then go, and God be with you."

"Amen to that."

"You will not be long absent?"

"I think a few short hours will see my return."

"And what are we to do until then?"

"It was for the purpose of seeing you on the subject that I came here. Your herdsman insists on going with me, and——"

"So he should. He has a brave heart and a strong arm; a better friend in the hour of danger could not be found."

"I thought it best that he should remain and guard you."

"Not so. We shall be in no danger, and, if we should, woe betide the man that crosses swords with Jose Herera, when fighting for his daughter."

"But is there—can there be any fear?" asked Inez, with trembling lips and ashy cheeks, all the timidity of her nature aroused."

"None—I think none," answered the Hermit. "Not one of these wandering Arabs of the Pampas—the Comanches—dare set foot here. There are none others to molest you, and of other dangers I know nothing."

"Then we are safe, dear father?"

"I trust so, yes. But you will not depart to-night? See, it is already growing dark."

"Yes; and it is time we were on the trail. The iron should be beaten when it is at white heat, and the red man found and punished when rioting in his spoils."

"Let me implore you not to risk your life," said Inez, laying her hand gently on his arm.

"For the sake of what they have stolen, no. To make

them feel my power, if it should become necessary, yes ! But fear not ; they will flee before me as a pack of wolves before a firebrand. See !” and stepping outside of the wigwam he pointed to a light gleaming afar off, like a star that had sunk very near to earth.

“What is it ?” asked Herera ; “I see nothing.”

“Do you not see that light ?”

“A bright planet on the verge of the sky ?”

“’Tis the fire of the Comanches. They are gorging themselves with half-cooked meat, and becoming drunk with hot blood. By Heaven ! but they shall rue the day they dared to run counter to my will ! They shall crawl at my feet like worms, or hide away from my sight in the rocks and caves of the mountains ! But forgive me,” and changing the subject, he informed the planter, with regard to the defences of the place, in case of attack, where he would find food and where water ; and then, with a very brief farewell, he departed, and returned to the herdsman and the Indian.

The tramp of the starting horses soon came to the ears of the father and daughter (who had stepped out from the wigwam, and stood upon the rocky point on which it had been built). In the darkness, they searched in vain for the Hermit. Certainly, those who were hastening away were two Indians, and the herdsman, whose tall and sinewy form could not be mistaken.

“Father,” said Inez, “that strange man is not with them.”

“Strange man, my child ? Who do you mean ?”

“He who calls himself the Hermit.”

“He is strange, indeed, and I doubt if we have yet seen him in all his disguises. Of one thing you may be certain, however. He is one of the party. I have before seen him in the dress, and acting the part of an Indian.”

“Sometimes his looks and actions terrify me,” and then she related the episode of the ring, ending with a question as to whether her father knew anything concerning it.

“No, my child, I do not. It was upon your mother’s

finger when I first saw her. She wore it until she died. I kept it both for her sake and yours, and when you became old enough, I gave it to you, as of right I should."

"But why should he start so wildly—why show so much of emotion at the sight of it, father?"

"I do not know. It is very strange."

"I shall never wear it again in his presence."

"It is best, after what has passed, that you should not. It is of peculiar shape—peculiar in the arrangement of the jewels, and, once seen, could neither be forgotten or mistaken."

"I never saw one like it."

"I doubt if there is its mate in the world. But I can not understand where the Hermit could have seen it, and, yet more, why it should awaken such bitterness in his heart."

"Oh! how I should love to know his history."

"It must be a wild and eventful one. Evidently he is a man of education, even refinement. With you, my daughter, I should like to know something of his life. Some day, when we become better acquainted, I will question him about it."

"Better not, dear father. I feel that there is some pain in his breast that had better not be disturbed."

"A woman's fear, Inez."

"But women's eyes often read more deeply the heart of man than they are given credit for. Believe me, dear father, the misanthropic and mysterious have a charm for our sex, such as yours never know. But, I wish he had explained the connexion between the ring and my dear lost mother."

"By Saint Jago! but he shall, child."

"Father," and she crept nearer to him, and whispered the words in his ears, as if fearful the wind, the trees, or the rocks might listen to them; "father, might he not have loved her, and——"

"Be still, child! The night air grows heavy, and the wind is cold. Let us go in. No words; you to your couch, and sleep, while I keep watch."

Watch ! he could not have slept if he would, for through the dark hours the words kept ringing in his ears, "*He might have loved her!*"

CHAPTER XIV

THE CARNIVAL OF GLUTTONY—THE POWER OF THE
HERMIT—A STRANGE MURDER.

WILD was the revel of the Comanches, when, having driven off the cattle of Herrera and safely corraled them at the foot of the high peak named after their tribe, they gave themselves up to enjoyment. Confident that they would not be followed, they, contrary to their usual custom, feasted without watching. Huge fires were built, and the hastily-prepared carcasses of some of the stolen cattle were roasted entire. The hot blood, as it spirted from the cut throats, was caught in rude cups and quaffed, steaming and curdling as it was. A draught to make humanity shudder and turn disgusted away. The steam that rose from the burning flesh was sickening. On the winds it was lifted and borne away. The carrion vultures filled the air with croakings above, and the keen-scented wolves howled around on every side—fit associates for the semi-cannibals that were glutting themselves with an inhuman feast.

In their savage rejoicings they had neglected to take any precautions against surprise, and a handful of resolute men could have slaughtered them like sheep in the shambles. Intent only upon the gratification of their inordinate and brutal appetites, they knew not—thought not that unbidden guests might come to the feast ; thought not that the bright light of their fires flashed far through the darkness, defining clearly their locality, and tempting those they had plundered to retaliation ; thought not that other eyes than ill-omened bird and snarling beast might gaze upon their frantic revels, as with whoop and shout and fiendish dance they tore the reeking flesh, and fran-

tically waved the half-picked bones; thought themselves perfectly secure, and yet—

“Other witnesses are nigh,
Who mock at fear and death defy.”

Cautiously leading the way, and closely followed by the herdsman and the Indian, came the Hermit. Stealthily as the tiger-cat they crept along, having left their horses at the base of the hill. Their moccasins gave back no sound that would have betrayed their approach, even if the screams of the almost devilish revel had been stilled.

“There,” whispered the leader to Glover, when they had reached a point above the Indians, and from which their every action could be plainly seen, “there is a more perfect fac-simile of incarnate fiends and hell upon earth than civilized eyes ever rested upon; but, by the bright heaven, they shall crawl like very serpents, and lick the dust for it!”

“I’d give er hull handful of dubloons ef my mates whar only here with their rifles,” answered the hersman, in the same cautious tone.

“They would regard them as little as they do the black buzzards that are croaking above. They are drunk with blood and ripe for murder. The Holy Virgin pity any prisoner who should fall into their hands now!”

“Waal, I rayther reckon ’twould be jest the same as ef you war ter throw er lamb inter er den of starvin’ cayoters, ther blood-lovin’, stealin’, murderin’ brutes!”

“Look!” interrupted the Great Bear, in his sententious manner, pointing to where the smoke partially obscured the scene.

“What is it?” asked the Hermit.

“Prisoner!”

“Er prisoner! By Heaven! but ther Bar tells ther truth. I kin see him now that the smoke has lifted, jest as plain as daylight,” broke in the herdsman. “Come, men, let’s give them ther bullets, and then ther knife and hatchet.”

"Are you mad?" questioned the Hermit, as he laid his hand on his arm, and held him as with a grasp of iron.

"Mad, did yer say? Waal, I reckon I am, and wiald wouldn't be ter see ther red devils er goin' ter roast er man arter they have done with ther brutes. But jest yer let go of my arm, fer I'd as lief have it in er vice. By thunder!" he added, when his request had been complied with, "who would have thought the old man could have had such er grip? I'll bet thar haint er grizzly in ther mountings that could have squeezed me tighter;" and he began to rub the compressed member to restore the circulation.

"Who is it?" asked the Hermit of the Indian; "white or red skin."

"The blood of the pale-face nor that of warriors runs in his veins."

"Neither white or red. Then he must be——"

"Er nigger?" again broke in Glover. "Waal, they haint of much ercount anyway, and yet——"

"He must and shall be saved. But, Bear, do you know him?"

"The eyes of Kaw-wa-gas-hi saw him waiting on the snowy lily of the pale-face."

"What, the dumb boy?"

"What, that poor black devil, Quito, that had his tongue cut out on his head by some infernal brute?" added the herdsman.

The Indian only replied by a nod of his head and a motion of his hand, and then, at a sign from him he ever followed, crawled down the ragged side of the cliff and disappeared.

"Waal, Signor, what are we ergoin' ter do now?" said Glover, fretting at not being allowed to shoot into the frantically rioting demons beneath him. "See, as I live and breathe ef they ar not ergoin' ter begin torturin' ther poor tongueless nigger," and he raised his rifle and prepared to fire, when the Hermit struck it to the earth, and whispered sternly in his ears:

"Leave all to me. You would come, against my will,

and now you must obey. *Must!* you need not scowl, and lay your hand on your knife. *I* am master here, and will be obeyed, even if I have to throw you bodily into the midst of the fiendish revelers."

The iron grip he had felt, added to the commanding figure and flashing eyes of the Hermit, exercised a control over the herdsman that he dared not attempt to break. Hard as it was for one reckless as himself to be controlled in the gratification of his passion—to be thwarted in his vengeance, he had found a master spirit, and a will stronger than his own. It was the mastery of his superior mind, and choking down his anger as best he might, he listened in silence.

"Herdsman, you must remain on this spot. From it you can see all that passes, but as you live—as you have any hopes of seeing yon poor captive set free—put down your rifle."

"And you?"

"Time and chance must determine. But I have never failed before, and, I think, will not now;" and he slipped off his Indian trappings, hastily put on the long hair and flowing beard of the Hermit, and with the single word, "Remember," disappeared in an opposite direction from that taken by the Great Bear.

Ill at ease and restless, the herdsman yet forced himself to remain, and stretching himself at full length crawled to a thicket on the very verge of the cliff, and watched.

A circle of dark warriors, with all the fury of their nature lashed into foam, and maddened by the barbarous excesses of their horrible feast, were dancing around the poor, bound, and helpless Quito. Pinioned closely to a tree, and half dead from fear, he was completely at their mercy. Mercy? Such a word had never been recorded in their lexicon, or such a feeling entered their savage hearts!

Whirling around, they threw their knives and hatchets at the fettered form, and their haste and blind fury alone saved his life. But such bloodless sport was far too tame for their fiery spirits. A human victim writhing at the stake

would be more akin to their feelings. The flesh, shriveling over the seething coals, and the hot blood as it spouted from the cracking skin, and was drunk up by the flaming tongues of the fire-demon, more of pleasure. Knife and hatchet were flung aside. The destined-to-be funeral fire was piled up with fresh fuel, and the flames waited only for the victim.

"Fire! Fire! The torture of fire!" rang from every lip as they rushed forward to seize him.

"Hold!" came thundering upon their ears, and starting back in dismay, they saw the Hermit arising as if out of the earth.

"The Meda! The Great Medicine-man! The Hermit!" was echoed from all sides by those who a moment before would have dared even the wrath of the Manitou.

"Is it thus you obey me! Did I not tell you the herds of the pale-face chief should be safe from your thieving? And now, not content with robbery, you would add murder! By the holy cross and the Great Manitou, whose tens of thousands of eyes are looking down upon you from the happy hunting-grounds, curses shall fall upon your tribe!"

"We will unbind the captive. We will set him free. We will return the cattle," was the meek answer of many tongues.

"You will do all this?" was the sneering reply.

"We will do all the Great Medicine bids us."

"You! Did you not know when you laid your murderous and blood-stained hands on yon captive that he was one whom the Great Manitou protects? Did you not know that his tongue was torn from his mouth, and that he could neither sing the song of victory or the whoop of defiance?"

"Kaw No!" and they shrunk back still farther in abject fear, for they, with all red men, believed that any one thus mutilated was, like the idiot and deformed, protected by the Great Spirit.

"Lies! all lies! Your black hearts would scruple at nothing to gratify your infernal passion."

"Let us unbind him. The Manitou will be angry with

us," plead the warriors, humbly, and were hastening to execute their self-imposed task, when the Hermit again waved them back.

"Forbear, vultures,—blood-lapping wolves! Lay but a finger on him if ye dare."

"But the Great Spirit," they began——

"Will protect his own. Quito, boy, come hither," and, unfettered and free, the poor slave staggered forward, and, throwing himself at the feet of the Hermit, and clasping them in his arms, kissed them in the excess of his joy.

"See," continued the Hermit, raising the poor mute to his feet; "see how the Manitou can loose the bonds; see how He who whispers in the winds, and speaks when angry in the bellowing thunder, can set the captive free."

All around stood in amazement. Well—more than securely had he been fettered before with tough bark of the elm, boiled and softened and twisted into "the prisoner string." And no human hand had touched him—no human form been near. How, then, he could have been freed of his bonds, except by direct orders from Heaven, transmitted through the Medicine-man, the Hermit, was more than their unlettered wisdom could fathom. Their superstitious minds were awed and trembling: they stood as if awaiting and expecting the fires of an avenging spirit to fall upon and consume them. But had the negro been gifted with the power of speech, or had their eyes been sharp enough to have pierced the dense thicket, they might have heard how the keen knife of the Great Bear had cut, obedient to the signal of his master, or have seen his dark form as he crawled, snake-like, away. But it was far beyond their comprehension, and they stood like criminals at the bar, awaiting their doom. And thus that strange tableau in the wilderness remained for a time. The dark circle of brawny warriors around—the Hermit standing erect with all the majesty of unquestioned power—the speechless slave kneeling at his feet, and looking up into his face with tearful gratitude—the black rocks and densely waving foliage for a back ground—the now flicker-

ing fire, casting ruddy flashes and weird shadows in front, and, over all, the stormy skies for a canopy. Minutes, that appeared lengthened out into hours, passed. So long, indeed, that the entire scene was so vividly photographed upon the brain of the watching herdsman as never to be forgotten. Then one of the bravest, and, perchance, least guilty and debauched of the warriors, tremblingly advanced, and said :

“ The cattle ! ”

“ Strange ! ” replied the Hermit, as one suddenly aroused from a dream, “ strange, that man can thus war upon his fellow-man ! Strange that gold—property—the dust of the earth, and the four-footed beasts that roam over it, should thus make murder a trade, and a traffic of blood.”

“ The Medicine is talking to the Great Spirit,” the warriors whispered one to another, for his thoughts had been uttered in English, a language unknown to them, but familiar to him as the Spanish or Comanche.

“ Strange, and yet did I not once——” Perchance he who ever paused when about to make some revelation concerning himself, might then have thrown wide open the secret pages of his life, had not a stone, loosened by Glover, in his efforts to get a better position, suddenly rolled with a crash among them, causing more than one to believe that the wrath of an offended Manitou was about to be appeased. As it was, it stayed the words of the Hermit, and turned his thoughts into another channel.

“ The same power that freed the captive from his bonds,” he continued, “ will set the herds of the pale-face at liberty. See ! I but weave the charm, and they will have the whole of the Pampas for a pasture-ground.”

Gazing with wondering eyes, the Indians saw him go thrice around the fire, and Glover, who, also, was watching every motion, and listening to every word, with astonishment, if not fear, could not refrain from muttering between his clenched teeth.

“ By ther Heavens, but he’s jest as bad as ther rest of them ! If they are not all tar’d with the same stick, and

goin' to ther devil in ther same boat, may I be hung for er sheep-stealin' dog."

The mystic circles completed, the Hermit bent himself low to the earth—arose, threw his hands wildly about, and uttered some words of hidden import, and strange sound to all; then, drawing a vial from his bosom, he threw the contents upon the coals. There was a loud explosion, and sudden flashes of blue flame—there was a suffocating smoke arose, and then, as the wind rolled the clouds away, all was silence and blackness.

"Er born devil," muttered the herdsman again, "and yer don't catch me any longer in *his* company!"

"Hark!" continued the Hermit, after a brief pause. Hark! the same hand that freed this poor slave has also broken down the walls of the corral! The cattle are at liberty. You can hear the thundering of their hoofs as they dash away from the sickening stench of your orgie. They are mad with the scent of freshly-spilled blood, and all of your savage race could not drive or control them now."

"And the anger of the Manitou," still asked the warriors, fearful that the impending curse had not yet passed away, and that the Hermit would call it down upon their heads.

"Three days hence you will know all. Swift as was your coming, let your return be, to your dens in the Colorado Hills. No pausing, and no turning aside from the trail. Let fasting follow feasting, and repentance, if such a thing can find its way into your brutal hearts, of your sin. Begone! Out of my sight, ye worse than wolves! Ye polluters of God's footstool, and carrion-loving vultures of his fairest pastures. Go! or——"

The single command was sufficient, uninforced by threats, and the boasted warriors of the south-western wilderness leaped, like a flock of sheep when wolf-driven, into the woods and disappeared.

"They are gone, and my power is confirmed! Once again my rule will be undisputed. Long years I toiled for this—long years suffered—long years practised deception. May the good Virgin be thanks, it was for a good end, and

when I am no more may it balance in some degree the great and fiendish—— How now, boy!"

The dumb slave had raised himself up at the departure of the Indians—had crawled as it were, up to the form of the Hermit, and was now peering intensely into his face, and drinking in every sound of his voice. And changed indeed it was from the one he ordinarily used, for that was strained and harsh, while that he now uttered his thoughts in, was his natural one. Abashed, if not afraid, the negro shrunk back again upon the earth, and crawled away. Was he looking for something on the ground, that he proceeded thus slowly and examined it inch by inch?

"Herdsman!" shouted the Hermit, as soon as he was freed from the negro. "Herdsman, come! Great Bear, I want you."

In a few minutes the former had crawled down the rocks, and stood by his side, while the Indian arose at the very instant from the tangled brushwood at his feet. He had faithfully executed his commission, and returned to guard his master against danger, come it in whatever form it might.

"Now," continued the Hermit, "that we are free from these demons, we must hasten back to the Signor and his daughter."

"Waal," replied the herdsman, edging away as the other came near him, "waal, ef he only saw what I have seen ter night, he'd never have anything to do with ye, I kin tell yer."

"Why, man, what do you take me for?"

"Own cousin ef not twin brother, or it may be ther devil his own self."

"Pshaw! I little thought that you would have been imposed upon by such simple means."

"Waal, it may be I'm simple and mean both, but curse me ef I either like er understand such doings, that's all. But what in thunder is that thar black rascal erbout now?" he added, seeing Quito busy in rebuilding the nearly extinguished fire. "I should have thought that he had come near ernuff ter roasting jest now, without kindlin' er fire for himself."

The attention of the Hermit thus called to the fact, he hastened to extinguish it.

"What are you doing, boy?" he asked; "do you want to bring another band of savages upon us? Have you not been near enough to death without tempting it again?" and he stooped down to cast the branches aside.

The action revealed both his face and form fully, and the flames as they leaped upwards, catching in his long hair and waving beard, he threw them off, and thus exposed his features as they had never before been seen by Quito. Quick as thought, the negro was by his side; his large eyes were fixed upon his face for a moment, and then, with a sound like the howl of a wild beast—a horrible, half-strangled, inarticulate moan—he sprang upon and buried a knife hilt-deep in his breast.

The poor, speechless slave had found what he had been searching for, as he crawled along the ground, and the knife of the Indian had found a bloody sheath. But, what the motive?—what the provocation?

CHAPTER XV

THE SHADOWS OF DEATH.

WITH a deep groan the Hermit fell backward, and the Indian, rushing upon the slave, would have slain him in a moment had not the herdsman interfered and protected him.

"No yer don't," shouted Glover; "yer don't touch him so long as I am alive. I don't understand why ther nigger should have done it arter the Hermit's saving his life; but I'll bet my mustang ergin er yearlin' bull that he had ergood reason fer it. So put up yer hatchet and look arter yer master. I rayther thinks he needs er tendin' ter. Bear er hand, man, and I'll help yer stop ther blood——"

Doubtful, indeed, would have been the issue—doubtful, whether the Indian would have rested until his vengeance

on the one who had thus wounded his master had been fully satisfied, if the Hermit had not summoned him in his native language to his side. The moment he turned away the herdsman grasped the arm of the negro and hurried him toward the woods, whispering in his ear :

" I don't know what yer meant, boy—I can't fer ther life of me see what yer did it fer, but I do know ther only chance fer yer neck is ter run like ther devil, while that ar Injun hain't er lookin' Ef ever he gits on yer trail yer ar er goner surer than a speared sucker, and all ther saltpeter in ther world wouldn't save you. So come onlong, ef yer don't want ter loose yer scalp," and he dragged him forward, almost on a run.

Vain was the resistance Quito made to the herdsman, for he, with his vast strength, and, excited as he was, would have made light of a much stronger and more bulky man. Once only he paused. On reaching a point from which he could look down upon the spot where the fire was still revealing its surroundings, he made a full stop.

" It whar er cussed mean, cowardly deed," he muttered to himself. " and I wouldn't have done it ter my worst enemy : but I s'pose thar whar er reason fer it that I don't know of. Ef they had bin any thing like an equil match now, ther Injun and ther nigger, I rayther think I'd have let them fight it out, aneway, fer it would only have bin dog eat dog, arter all," and then observing, for the first time, the bloody knife still in the hands of the slave, he continued :

" Jest yer drop that ar scalper as quick as ever yer kin ! Throw it away, or by Heaven I'll play Injun myself, and let er little daylight inter yer ugly carcase, quicker nor er flash. What, yer won't, hay ?" and he bore it from his grasp, and sent it whirling into the bushes.

With tightly clenched hands and sullen face, the negro stood as if pondering the chances of resenting the insult. His lips were compressed and trembling—every muscle worked like one in a fit—his eyes were blood-shot and staring wildly, and his entire nature appeared to have undergone a terrible change. It was as if the man had

been suddenly transformed into a beast, and lashed himself into a gigantic passion and fury, restrained only by strong bars and heavy chains.

"What ther thunder is ther matter with yer, man?" questioned the herdsman, as he saw the fearful expression of his face. "Have yer got the hydrerphoby?" and he held him off at arms length. "Why don't yer tell me what's ther matter with yer, and what yer stabbed the poor Hermit fer, ye miserable nigger that ye are? But I forgot that yer are jest as dun as er door nail. Ye kin make motions anyhow. What, yer wont? Then ye shall go ter yer master and young mistress, and see ef they can't bring yer out of ther kinks," and again he dragged him relentlessly through the thick bushes and over the ragged rocks.

The horses were soon found—the negro placed upon the back of the one that had been ridden by Glover—placed, rather than getting there of his own volition, and the herdsman, pointing the way as well as he was able, through the half-light of early morning, bade him be off.

"Ride like ther devil, ye black cut-throat, for ye are one of his imps, anyhow," he said, "and tell the planter what ye have bin er doin'. Mind yer don't stop on ther way, or try ter get back and give that poor old chap ernother cut with ther scalpin'-knife, fer if yer do, cuss me ef I don't let ther Injun have his own way," and he gave the fiery mustang a blow that sent him dashing headlong on the way.

Stretched at full length upon the ground, and with his head supported by the Indian, Great Bear, the herdsman saw the wounded man, on his return to the spot where he had left him. His buckskin hunting-shirt had been torn open, and a compress placed with rude skins over the wound. The usually flushed face was pale, his lips destitute of their firmness and decision—his eye had lost its fire, and his strong arms lay nerveless as a woman's. Somewhat accustomed to seeing death both by bullet and knife, the herdsman was not an altogether incompetent judge of what the result would be. Had the blood down

freely after the keen-edged steel had penetrated, there might have been some hope. But the hemorrhage was entirely internal, and death must follow. It was simply a question of time—of how much of resistance and strength remained in the stricken form.

"The cussed nigger struck yer home, that's fer sartin," was the comment of the herdsman, as he knelt down by the side of the Hermit, with more of gentleness than would have been supposed to be possible from one so rude and uncouth both in speech and manner. "It whar er cowardly blow, and ef I hadn't er thought ther black skunk was kinder crazy, I don't know but what I'd er given him er good choking, myself. But, how do yer feel now?"

"My days, my hours are numbered. The knife was sharp and keen, the arm strong, and nerved by intense hatred, that drove it home," was the faint reply.

"Then ver hain't no kinder chance fer ter live?"

"None. Where has the negro gone?"

"I sent him off arter ther planter and his daughter. I thought that prehaps yer might have somethin' ter say ter them that ver wouldn't like ter say ter er poor underecated devil like me. Still, ef thar's anythin' on yer mind—anythin' yer would like ter have done, jest you say ther word, and ef I don't do it, may I never go ter glory, that's all."

"It is well. I would see Jose Herera and his daughter again before I die. And yet, how can I control myself? When in perfect health and strength, I sought but vainly to do so, and can I hope to be more successful now that my end is drawing near?"

"But what did ther nigger try ter murder yer fer? That's what sticks in my crop, and I'd like ter know ef you have no reason fer not telling it."

"Man! man! Why do you ask?" replied the other, suddenly starting up, and glaring wildly around him.

"Waal, I didn't want to rile yer up, and, ef it is er secret, Sy Glover hain't ther man ter pry inter it."

"Oh! that I could forget the past. That I could bury it beneath the eternal mountains—that I could sleep forgetful and for ever!"

"Waal, I hain't no kind of er parson, and I couldn't think of er prayer, ef it whar ter save my own life."

"Prayer! Have I not bowed myself in prayer for this many a long, dreary year. But what has it availed me? I had thought I was forgiven. Thought that I could die in piece, trusting to the glory that glistened above the cross. But this negro——"

"Whar is he?" and Glover sprung to his feet, expecting to see Quito standing bodily before him. "Don't be crefeard! He shan't come near yer."

"He had good reason for his vengeance," continued the Hermit, without noticing the interruption, "for did I not—Oh, God! the fearful agony of the moment when I awoke from my insane passion, and fully realized what I had done—realized that I——" and he checked himself suddenly, and motioned to the anxiously watching Indian.

"What is it yer want?" asked the herdsman, "Ther Injun is er good one and true as steel, I have no kind er manner of doubt, accordin' ter his color, and will do ther best he can, but it would be more mannerly fer yer ter be waited on by er white man."

"Water!" came in feeble accents from the lips of the suffering man—"water! for the love of the holy Virgin, water!"

"Ef thar is any within er dozen miles, ye shall not ask twice fer it. Ef I whar only near my old ranche, now, you should have ther best that ever sprung out er the rocks and ran through green moss. But yer see, I'm kind of strange here, and don't know whar ter look fer it."

"Let the pale-face take his brother in his arms," whispered the Great Bear, sadly. "The red man knows where the spring leaps from its home in the rocks—pure, cool, and sweet."

"Waal, I reckon that will be the best plan, and yet——" he glanced down timidly at the pale face, fevered lips, and closed and hollow eyes, and then checked himself, as he saw the thin lips of the Indian curl with scorn, and refrained from telling that he was afraid to remain

alone with, and nold the head of a dying—it might be a dead man.

And yet, so it was. He who had battled hand to hand with the wily and savage Comanches, he who had fought in the wild battles of the border, and laughed death to scorn; he who had seen the grim destroyer come suddenly and unannounced, and bear away his comrades from his side; he who was familiar with, and had made playthings of knife, hatchet, and rifle, shrunk back from being thus alone with death. But was he—is he—alone in this feeling?

“Kaw-wa-gas-hi will be swift as the wood-pigeon flies,” was the remark of the Indian, as he turned and disappeared.

“Water!” again came from the lips of the Hermit.

“As I live, ef I haven’t lost my flask!” muttered Glover. “I never wanted it so much before, since ther cwy ther infernal red-skins set fire ter ther perarer, and tried ter burn me up. Ef I only had er drop of speerit, now, who knows but it might——”

“Water! Will you give me a drink? I am dying with thirst.”

“Jest hold on er minit and I’ll git yer some, ef I die for it,” and Glover laid his head gently down and followed the footsteps of the Indian.

He had gone, however, but a few upward steps along the rocky trail before he raw a sight that made him forget the object of his mission, and caused him suddenly to pause. Like a bird fascinated by the lidless eyes of the serpent, he remained motionless, watching the scene below.

From one side of the little clearing on which the fire had been built and the savage feast held, he saw the dumb negro, Quito, (whom he had set after his master and deemed far on his way, if not already returning,) crawling stealthily along. More like a black log than a human form he appeared, and so serpent-like were his movements, that one, unless very intently watching, would have failed to discover that he was gifted with life at all. But other eyes than those of the herdsman were upon him. The

Great Bear was also creeping, and with equal caution, from the opposite side, and Glover readily perceived that his presence was unknown to the negro. Forming, as they did, two legs of a triangle with the wounded man for the point of intersection, the distance either had to pass over was about equal, and would require about the same time. The purpose of the negro in thus returning could not be other than an hostile one, and that of the Indian, protection. Satisfied, however, that the Great Bear was sufficiently able to cope with his antagonist, Glover drew nearer and watched, himself unseen, the result of that strange encounter.

For a moment the black man paused, and slowly raising his head from the tangled grass, gazed cautiously around, revealing his eyes still flashing wildly and blood-shot, and the blade of a long knife firmly clutched between his teeth. As if satisfied that the coast was clear, he resumed his recumbent posture, and moved more rapidly forward. He neared the dying man—he was at his side—he raised himself upon his knees beside him, his arm was bared to the shoulder, and the instrument of death was flashing in the air and already descending to cleave the heart in twain, and let out the little that remained of life, when he was hurled backward, and the Great Bear stood over him with his tomahawk whirling above his unprotected skull. It was a moment of terrible danger to the negro and anxiety to the herdsman, and his foot was already lifted to rush forward, and his lips parted to forbid the deed of death, when the dying man suddenly raised himself with a mighty effort upon his elbow, and applying his whistle to his lips, rang forth the shrill call that the Indian never heard but to obey.

“Forbear! Touch him not!” he said, when the Indian, whom he had called, knelt again by his side. He must be sacred from your revenge. His wrongs have been great, and I—I—— Water, water!”

“You infernal black rascal!” shouted Glover, as he came rushing up and laid his strong grasp on the negro. “You’d stab er dyin’ man, would you, ye cussed blood-thirsty brute. Ef I didn’t think that thar war somethin’

more about it than I kin understand, I'd soon teach yer er lesson that you wouldn't forget in er hurry," and he shook him as if he had been a dog.

Implicitly as the Indian had been accustomed to obey the will of the Hermit, who held him by some strange power—who had bound him by the strongest ties of affection—yet it was with extreme difficulty he was restrained, when Glover dragged the negro to the side of the diving man, and perfectly within his grasp. His fingers played convulsively with the handle of his scalp-knife—his breast heaved with its pent-up passions—his thin lips were locked fast, and his nostrils swelled with the thickly rushing and hot breath.

"None of that, Bar!" shouted the herdsman, as he saw him standing with every sinew braced like a tiger crouched for its spring. "None of that, for it can't be did. Ther Hermit (cuss me, ef I wouldn't like ter know what er man turns hermit fer, when thar's so much fun in the world, and so many pooty gals down on the Brazos) said he warn't ter be teched, and he shan't, that's flat! So jest put up yer weepoon, or you'll find it is er game in which thar's nary er lone hand."

"Let the negro be unharmed," again whispered the victim of his savage passion. "Let no one lay a finger on him to injure him; but keep him safe so that he may not do any more mischief. The blow he struck was a deep and true one, and none other need fellow to insure his perfect revenge."

"But what ther devil did he stab yer fer?—that's what I want to know." The idea constantly ran in the brain of the man, and would not be quieted.

"In other days—years ago, I—— Give me a drink. I feel as if there was a fire within me, drying up my heart's blood."

"What ar yer grinning erbout, yer murderin' reptyle?" asked Glover, as he saw the face of the negro glowing with the most intense satisfaction, and his lips part with a smile that revealed the white teeth within. "By ther Heavens, but I think yer ar as dangerous as er caged rattle-snake, and only ar er waitin' fer er good chance ter

bite. Come er long with me, Bar, and we'll tie him so tight, that it will take more'n er nother interposition of yer Great Manitou ter git him loose. But none of yer knife work, fer it won't do. Yes, that's it. We'll bind him and keep him till we see ther Signor and his pooty daughter. They'll straiten him out jest as easy as a string. That's it," he added, as the Indian, with ready skill, fettered every limb of the unresisting prisoner. That's it. You understand ther game, and have had er hand in it erfore. And now, Mr. Nigger, you'll jest have ter keep still as er rat in er trap, while we wait on yer betters, ye black pirate."

"The Great Medicine will soon be in the happy hunting-grounds of the Spirit land," whispered the Indian to his companion, as they returned.

"That ar er fact, and I wish we could do somethin' fer ther poor man. Now I hain't much of er medicine myself, Bar, but you, bein' er red-skin, oughter have some of ther gifts."

"The Great Manitou alone can save him."

"But can't yer guess what ther cussed nigger tried ter murder him fer?"

"The young years of the White Medicine are as hidden to Kaw-wa-gas-hi as the stars, when the spirit of the storm has let down his black mantle between them and the earth."

"Who knows but ther stabbin' scamp might have thought that he had done some wrong ter his young mistress? Yes, that is it, I'll bet er hat full of ounces. But come, Bar, we must do all fer ther poor man we kin. It is er Christian dooty. Ef I could only think of er little prayer now. But my edercation was neglected on that pint when I whar little, and I hain't had time to larn any since," and he knelt by the Hermit and took hold of his hands, while the Indian lifted his head into his lap, and gently brushed back the damp hair—damp with the dew of death—from his forehead.

"The planter, Jose Herrera, his daughter, and——" came breathed almost like a moan from his lips, after he had with great difficulty swallowed a portion of the water the

herdsman held to him. There was another name, also he would have uttered, but failed to do so.

"They hain't come yet, Signor, though, ef that ar nigger had only done as I told him, they would have been here long ergo, cuss him!"

"I wished to see them before I died. To tell them that—that—— But it is too late now," and he closed his eyes again.

"Waal, you know yer own mind ther best, but ef you have er notion to tell me what you whar ergoin' to say, I'll tell it ter them agin, word for word, jest as near as ever I kin."

"You would not know—you would not understand," murmured the dying man, and then continued in an almost inaudible whisper, and in, to them, a strange tongue.

"He is talking to the Great Spirit," said the Indian, bowing his head earnestly.

"He is er sayin' his prayers," answered the herdsman, "but, what is he feelin' in his breast fer?"

The Indian gently guided the blindly groping hand, and when the fingers closed upon the little cross he ever wore about him, and he had drawn it forth and pressed it to his lips, a great calm rested upon his face. Let his faith have been right or wrong, the emblem that all Christians revere brought a solace to his heart in that hour of deepest trial, and who dare question that angels attended that parting soul, just as much as if he had worshipped at the same shrine, and knelt at the same altar with us. Better not judge until we too are standing in the valley of shadows—until our feet are pressing the shores of the dark river, and our eyes are being freed from earthly scales, and the flood-gates of the coming glory are opening to us.

Calmed by his communion with the God he worshipped, he opened his eyes again, and speke in a strange voice, though it was but the expiring strength of a flame that should very soon be extinguished for ever.

"Quitto! The negro? Where is he?"

"Tied ter er tree, jest as tight as ther bark itself."

"I would have him freed, and——"

"Give him ernother chance ter stab yer, s'pose?"

"It is too late, now, for him to do me any harm, and——"

"You are too weak ter talk ter him. So it hain't of no use."

"It is my dying request, and you will not refuse me."

"Certainly not," and then he added in a lower voice, and one inaudible, except to the Indian: "We must let him have his way, ther poor man, but I'll be shot ef I don't keep him tied, so that he can't do any more of his cuttin' and slashin'."

"Hark!" interrupted the Hermit, with strange and startling distinctness. "Hark! I hear the sound of horses' feet. They are coming—coming at a swift gallop!"

"The Great Medicine is right," replied the Indian, after he had bent his ear to the ground and listened for a moment.

"They are coming, the horses of the pale-face."

"How do you know that, Bar?" asked Glover. "How do you know that they hain't Injuns?"

"They have iron upon their hoofs, and the sharp bit has taught them a shorter lope than the free-mouthed horses of the red man."

"By Heaven! you are right, Bar. Right fer er thousand! It is ther Signor and his daughter. I kin see them now," and he waved his hat high in the air.

"Jose Herrera and his child?" questioned the Hermit.

"Jest as sure as you ar er livin' man."

"God be thanked," and the dying man struggled to his elbow, and looked in the direction of the sound. "Yes, God and the Holy Virgin be thanked, I shall see them again, and live to tell them—tell them—that—that——" and he fell exhausted backward into the outstretched arms of his companions, just as the planter and his daughter came upon the little clearing.

CHAPTER XVI.

LAST SCENE OF ALL.

"Good Heavens! what can be the matter?" was the exclamation and question of the planter, as he leaped from his horse, assisted his daughter to dismount, and hastened to the side of the dying man.

"Murder!" answered the herdsman, in his usual bluff manner.

"Murder! Oh! who could have done the horrible deed!" whispered Inez, with a true woman's love, sympathy and fear, as she gazed trembling and awe-stricken on the bloodless face and ashy lips.

"Who'er yer think but that thar nigger of your'n. Thar he is, tied ter ther tree, the miserable reptyle."

"What, Quito? It cannot be. There must be some mistake."

"Wash, begging your pardon, I saw him when he did it, and so did thar Injun."

"By Saint Jago! but he shall die for it," exclaimed the planter. "Yes, my child, if he were twenty times your pet slave, his life should pay for this deed. Herdsman, untie him, and bring him hither."

"I don't know, Signor, but what you are right, and that it'll be justice ter make ther brute stretch hemp; but yer see ther poor man that's er dyin' says it mustn't be so. But I'll go and fetch him," and he soon led Quito forward.

Quick as sunlight flashing through dark clouds, the expression on the face of the negro changed. All of sullen apathy and ill-gratified passion faded from it, and, with a look of intense satisfaction, he threw himself at the feet of his young mistress, and pressed the hem of her dress to his lips, as a devotee would have done some holy relic.

"Quito," she said, "tell me if this horrible tale can be true! Oh! tell me if you have steeped your hands in blood, and stained your soul in murder."

The expressive action of the negro was a most perfect confirmation of the truth of Glover's words. There was no attempt at concealment or prevarication. Even a wild gleam of savage pleasure flashed from his eyes, and the planter, in the excitement of the moment, would have struck him to the earth, had not his daughter interfered and turned aside the blow.

"Father, dear father," she pleaded, "control yourself—control your anger, just though it may be, until I learn more of the matter. There is some mystery here. Poor Quito has always been so kind and gentle, that I cannot understand how he could raise his hand against any man, much less to take the life of one who had befriended him."

"That's jest what I told em," broke in Glover, "and I have bin er tryin' to find out what it could have meant. Yes, I reckon thar's er mystery somewhar."

"It matter's not," answered the planter, "what his provocation has been; he shall die, by Heaven!"

"Signed, sealed, and sworn ter, Signor."

"But, father, you will not—you cannot be so unjust."

"Out of my sight with him, then! First, we must attend to this poor man, and then the negro shall meet his deserts. See to it, herdsman, that he does not escape," and he turned again to the fast-expiring Hermit.

But Inez, followed by the negro, as obedient to her every word as a spaniel, and the herdsman, whose curiosity was far too great to allow him to rest until it was satisfied, stepped a little apart. That Quito would much sooner have been alone with his mistress when he told the reason of his attempted murder, was evident from his actions. But he dared not question her will; and when she had demanded an explanation for the third time, he knelt before her, pointed to the Hermit, made gestures as of one cutting with a knife, and opening his mouth, revealed the remains of his mutilated tongue.

"By ther great Heavens!" shouted Glover, "and so he whar ther man that cut your tongue out, whar he? May I be scalped and tortured ef I don't think I'd have done

the same thing. Cuss me ef I ever heard of a more devilish job in my life. And yet it ar er hard matter ter strike er man in cold blood."

A deep groan from the lips of the dying man interrupted them: and the voice of the planter called Inez and the herdsman to his side.

"Where is she?" came struggling from the marble lips. "Where is Inez Herera, the chief of—— Oh, God! that it should be too late."

"I am here—here by your side," and she pressed his hand to her lips.

But the action met with no response, and the herdsman first broke the stillness with:

"By Heaven, ef he hain't gone!"

"Holy and blessed Mother, have pity and spare him," prayed Inez.

"We have, indeed, come too late," added the planter. "Oh! that he had lived long enough to explain the mystery that I feel is deeply connected with ourselves."

"See?" whispered the Hermit, as he drew his hand feebly over his eyes, as if to clear his vision. "See! she is coming—my—my—— Oh, God! my brain is whirling. Must I perish thus, Holy Mother. Perish before I have told—told—that—that——"

"Yes, I am glad you have come," resumed the Hermit, "come while breath is left me to tell you that—that——"

"Oh, God!" burst from the lips of the planter, "spare him until the mystery is solved."

"Holy Mother," prayed Inez, "grant him strength to tell me of my dear, lost mother."

As if the prayer had been heard and answered, the dying man, assisted by the Indian, slowly raised himself up, and continued, the words breaking from his ghastly lips in scarcely audible whispers, and thrilling on the ears of his auditors, as he told the tale of fear.

"Yes, God and the Holy Virgin will give me strength. But listen, for my time is short. Death is clutching my heart-strings, and what is said must be said very quickly. Inez Herera hear, and then curse me if you will."

"Even if you wronged my mother, nothing but prayers could pass my lips in such an hour as this."

"*I—loved—your—mother!*" The words were uttered slowly and fitfully, as if the heart was throbbing itself out with them.

"Go on!"

"As man never loved woman I worshipped her. Beautiful as a dream was she, and I—I—— It matters not now, but I was her equal in rank and wealth. Well, for a time, I thought I could win her, though she never gave me any encouragement. It was folly—madness! One night—oh God, that pang! one night we met beneath the orange-trees on the Brazos. I told her of my love, and—and—why did I not die then!—and—was—discarded."

"Water!" gasped Inez. "Give him water, for Heaven's sake."

It was brought—the parched lips and fever-dried throat moistened, and again he resumed :

"Yes, I—the son of—— No, no, the name shall perish with me, for I am the last of my race. But I was discarded, and all my wild love turned in an instant into devilish hate. Your mother wore a miniature of herself. I struggled to obtain it, but was frustrated by the coming of others. With an impious oath that both she and that should be mine, I departed, and—and——"

"God forgive him, he is dead."

"No, the vultures of death are tearing at my vitals, but I must live yet. My money hired bravos. In a body we sought the house of her parents. It was night, and my will was law to the cut-throats. Blood was their trade, and I knew they would scruple at nothing. In the darkness and silence, I entered the chamber where your mother slept. She was praying, but, God forgive me, what did I think of that? I tore her from her knees—I—I—— Another pang like that, and all will be over."

"But tell me that you wronged her not, and then give your thoughts to God."

"I lifted her in my strong arms—I was bearing her to the window. A fleet horse was waiting—I stifled her

shrieks. She was mine—mine! A dark form sprang to her rescue. I struck him to the floor—lifted and hurled him into the midst—I gave an order for his punishment—one that would effectually silence him—oh! Heaven forgive me, it was too literally obeyed. But I was mad—mad, and knew not what I said. The shrieks of your mother were renewed—I tore the miniature from her throat—the ring you wore was upon her hand—I would have possessed myself of it, also, but dared not stay—I sprang to the ground—my fleet horse bore me away—and—and your mother became an angel, and I——”

The effort was too great for him, and he sank back and closed his eyes for the last time. The blood accumulating within was drowning out all of pulsation from the heart, and beginning to flow in a crimson stream over the parted lips. And yet he struggled wildly with swift-coming dissolution—struggled to tell the great secret that he had so long locked fast in his heart. But every sound was forced through bloody lips, and strangled almost in the utterance. A confused mass of sound, without clearness or individuality, alone fell upon the ears of the listeners as they bent solemnly around. His breast heaved and struggled—his eyes stared wildly open—his fingers were clutched in the death-agony—his jaw dropped—the gurgling flow of the heart's blood was checked and curdled in his throat, and the Hermit of the Colorado Hills had passed to the land that lies on the thither shore of time. Ah! it is true that there is but a beat of the heart, and a throb of the pulse between this world and the next, and from the dream of life he had been awakened to the reality of an endless eternity.

Inez Herera was on her knees with bowed head and tearful eyes, while she held the little cross to the lips of the dying man. Her father had buried his face in his hands, and even the rude and reckless herdsman betrayed intense emotion. The negro who had been the cause of all, stood in the background, while the Indian still held the head of the suffering one, outwardly unmoved, until all was over. Then he arose, and after composing the limbs as decently as was possible, and closing the eyes, he

motioned to the herdsman, and the twain disappeared in the woods.

An hour passed, and then they returned, and lifted the body without a word—bore it into a dense thicket—and laid it in the narrow grave they had prepared. And there, after Inez had poured out her heart in prayer—a sad, simple, and touching funeral service—the departed one was left to his final rest. A little mound was raised, and huge stones piled upon it to keep the wild beasts from disturbing the remains, and then they turned sorrowing away. It was almost like burying one in the wide waste of ocean, and they felt deeply that he would be truly left alone with God.

“Here,” whispered Glover to Inez, hoarsely, when they had passed out of sight of the grave, “here is something we found hung by er ribbon round the neck of the poor man. Perhaps you may make something of it, though I can’t,” and he handed her a locket.

“Father! father!” she asked in accents of fear and agony; “father, look at this face, and tell me truly if it was——”

“It was your mother’s, child!” and he turned away to avoid farther questioning.

“It’s er pooty face, anyhow,” broke in Glover, and——”

“Hush!” and she pressed the picture to her lips, and then concealed it in her bosom. There was a feeling of unrest springing up within her heart—a fearful surmise that would not be quieted, and yet she could not bear that any one should gaze on the sweet face she had worshipped so long with all of a true daughter’s affection.

“Inez,” said her father, “it is time we were making preparations to return home; time that we should turn our backs on these fatal Pampas.”

“But, dear father, why this mystery? It cannot, cannot be that my mother was—— Oh, God! the thought will drive me mad.”

“Your mother was as good and pure as yourself, child, and is an angel now. Where that strange man ever saw her—how he came by her mnrniature—what his mystery, I

cannot understand. He might have loved and been disappointed. Whatever it was, it has died with him, and all our surmises are vain—nay, worse, even useless. But we will talk about it another time."

"And my mother? Oh! tell me again that she was——"

"Was stainless as the snow."

"Thank God for that! My mother, my dear mother!"

"I wonder whar that ar Injun has got ter," asked the herdsman, suddenly looking around and noticing that he had let them. "Now, jest as we want him ter guide us back ergin, he's off like er shot, and be blamed ter him."

"And where is poor Quito?" and Inez called him, but without avail.

"Ef he haint run erway, I'll soon find him," and the herdsman departed on the search.

At a little distance he stumbled over the prostrate form of the negro, lying mostly hid in the thick bushes. Was he dead, also, that he neither roused at his voice or resented the kick given him?

"Won't yer git up yer brute?" and Glover turned him rudely over, so as to obtain a view of his face, for he laid with it buried in the leaves.

A single glance told the entire story. The knife of the Indian, Great Bear, was still in his side, and sudden and noiseless had been his death. The red man, true to his nature, had revenged the murder of the Hermit, and both were sent suddenly into the presence of their God and Judge.

Another grave was prepared, and the tongueless slave deposited therein. Just as all was finished, and they were turning away, the comrades of the herdsman, and the slaves of the planter, came upon the scene. The Indian, after his silent and sudden vengeance upon poor Quito, had hastened to meet and direct them. Then he had disappeared in the direction of Colorado Hills, never again to be seen, even by the herdsman, though they long remained
ding the vast dunes amid the wilderness of the

Both father and daughter had seen enough of frontier life, never again to be tempted from their beautiful home on the Brazos River. The strange words—the unexplained meaning of the Hermit—left a shadow on their hearts that could not be driven away ; but Inez, satisfied that (no matter what might have been the mystery) her dear and sainted mother was sinless, waited until angel lips should tell the **story** that earthly ones had failed to reveal.

THE END.

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